ISSUE 180 | JULY 2010

DUNGEON

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

ISSUE NO. 180

CONTENTS

4 THE SPIRAL GATE

By Scott Fitzgerald Gray

The separatist faction of Bedine desert tribesfolk known as the Sand Kings have long opposed the iron grip of Netheril's restored masters, the Shadovar. Now the Sand Kings have uncovered a dangerous and far-reaching Shadovar plot ... but whose side will the heroes join? A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure for 16th-level characters.

34 CHAOS SCAR: THE PILLAR OF EYES

By Robert J. Schwalb

Not far from the wall bounding the Chaos Scar's haunted lands is a crooked stone pillar, standing alone in an otherwise ordinary field. It resembles nothing so much as a stack of staring eyeballs. Thus far, the Pillar of Eyes has remained a hoary and puzzling edifice. Recent study of the stone, however, suggests that whatever it contains might be growing restive. Perhaps someone with special talents might be able to touch its magic and claim it. "The Pillar of Eyes" is a Chaos Scar adventure for five characters of 4th level.

48 CHAOS SCAR: DOWN THE GOBLIN HOLE

By Gareth Hanrahan

In his youth, Urgog the Mangler was a feared goblin warrior and raider. Eventually, he and his warband were driven deep into the Chaos Scar and weren't heard from again. It was hoped that Urgog was dead ... but he's not. A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure for 2nd-level characters.

60 AERIAL BATTLES

By Robert J. Schwalb

Airships provide swift and relatively safe travel at a modest price for passengers, but such voyages are not without danger. Storms can whip and fling an airship to the ground. Prowling pirates descend from the great cloudbanks to strike passersby in the air or on the ground, while larger, deadlier monsters may regard an airship as a meal.

3 EDITORIAL

By Steve Winter

Looking forward to *Dark Sun*, looking backward to *Empire of the Petal Throne*.

68 EYE ON DARK SUN

By Rodney Thompson

The sorcerer-kings of Athas keep the Dragon at bay by offering it sacrificial victims at the infamous and well-hidden Dragon's Altar.

72 EYE ON THE REALMS

By Ed Greenwood

Heldran Rallyhorn is devoted to keeping the nobility of Faerûn 'pure', and his methods have made him both loved and feared.

75 SAVE MY GAME

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

A home-grown campaign needs home-grown flavor, and there are tools available that can help keep things organized.

78 DUNGEONCRAFT

By James Wyatt

Even when creating your own, unique campaign world, you can draw on published adventures to keep things moving.

ON THE COVER
Illustration by Tyler Walpole

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, *DUNGEON*, *DRAGON*, d20, d20 System, Wizards of the Coast, all other Wizards of the Coast product names, and their respective logos are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, LLC, in the U.S.A. and other countries.

This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A. ©2010 Wizards of the Coast, LLC.

No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. For more DUNGEONS & DRAGONS articles, adventures, and information, visit www.wizards.com/dnd

DUNGEON®

DUNGEON

180

DUNGEON July 2010

Editor-in-Chief	Steve Winter
Senior Art Director	Jon Schindehette
Web Production	Bart Carroll
Contributing Authors	Scott Fitzgrerald Gray, Ed Greenwood, Gareth Hanrahan, Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Robert J. Schwalb, Rodney Thompson, James Wyatt
Developers	Jeremy Crawford, Stephen Schubert
Editors	Miranda Horner
Cover Artist	Tyler Walpole
Contributing Artists	Empty Room Studios, McLean Kendree, Jeffrey Lai, Chuck Lukacs, Tyler Walpole
Cartographers	Jason A. Engle, Mike Schley
Publishing Production Specialists	Angelika Lokotz, Erin Dorries, Christopher Tardiff
Web Development	Mark A. Jindra
Executive Producer, D&D Insider	Christopher Perkins
Director of RPG R&D	Bill Slavicsek

Special Thanks

Richard Baker, Greg Bilsland, Michele Carter, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, Andy Collins, Bruce R. Cordell, Jeremy Crawford, Peter Lee, Mike Mearls, Kim Mohan, Cal Moore, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Matthew Sernett, Rodney Thompson, James Wyatt

The Psurlon Cometh

The approaching release of the new *Dark Sun* edition has my fingers twitching at the thought of holding the new books in my hands and actually turning pages. Of course, we've had final PDFs for a while, so we've been able to flip virtual pages to our heart's content and see exactly what will soon be available in print.

No one should be surprised to hear that I'm a big fan of the *Dark Sun* setting. I was involved in early concepting on the original world, before it even had a name. Beyond that, I've always been a sucker for a) deserts, b) crumbling civilizations, and c) fantasy settings that are entirely different from the norm (whatever you define that to be). So the *Dark Sun* PDFs have been getting a good going-over on my computer, and I must say that I love what I'm seeing.

One side effect of immersing myself in all things Athas is that I've also been led back to *Empire of the Petal Throne*. I'd love to know, out of all the people reading this, how many of you are familiar with EPT, how many have heard of it but don't know anything beyond the name, and how many have never even heard of this legendary game.

The original *Empire of the Petal Throne* was published by TSR in 1975, making it a true trailblazer in RPGs. It had its own game rules, although they were familiar to original D&D players. It was EPT's setting of Tékumel that made it legendary.

Tékumel was the fiercely unique creation of Professor M. A. R. Barker, who had been imagining and writing about it for decades before D&D was a glimmer in Dave's and Gary's eyes.

Very briefly, in the far future, mankind perfected the science of traveling between stars. We moved out into the galaxy, exploring and settling new worlds and meeting many other races of intelligent beings. The planet Tékumel was a crossroads between alien races, many of whom had cities there—including some of humanity's most implacable enemies.

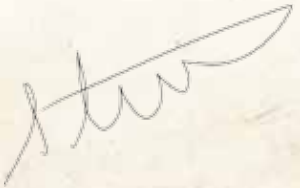
Then came "the Time of Darkness." Inexplicably, Tékumel fell through the fabric of space and time into a pocket dimension where it was utterly isolated from the universe we know. Even the laws of nature were different in this new realm. As the shattered world clawed its way back toward civilization, failing technology was replaced by magic and science was replaced by powerful, inscrutable, and often cruel gods. Vicious beasts were twisted into cosmic horrors. After tens of thousands of years, Tékumel became a completely different place—except that the animosity of humanity's ancient enemies persisted, and the ruins of its star-spanning empire were entombed beneath crumbling, dead cities.

That's Tékumel. Interesting parallels can be drawn between it and Athas; most are no more than artifacts of a common heritage, I'm sure, although a few homages certainly crept into the younger setting. What really struck me on rereading EPT, however, was the cold-blooded deadliness of Tékumel.

In 1975, D&D in general had a fatality rate approaching that of Left 4 Dead, but Tékumel was especially lethal. It abounded with creatures such as Thúnru'u, the Eater of Eyes, and spells such as the Silver Halo of Soul-Stealing. Death came in many forms on Tékumel, and it came frequently.

Dark Sun has a well-earned reputation as a place that's hard on player characters. Still, we can all be grateful that game designers have learned that no matter how enjoyable you make the process of creating new characters, that's not why people play the game. Soon, we"ll once more stride the dusty streets of Tyr with trikals in our fists and adventure in our souls.

I'm ready. Are you? Let us know at dndinsider@wizards.com.



The Spiral Gate

By Scott Fitzgerald Gray

illustration by Tyler Walpole ✦ cartography by Mike Schley

TM & © 2010 Wizards of the Coast LLC All rights reserved.

All Faerûn's fate is being shaped in Netheril. You can hide behind your belief that this is all about other lands, other people, other lives, but in the end, your lands and your people will be caught up in this struggle like all the rest. So decide now. Which side are you on?

In "The Spiral Gate," the characters find themselves caught up in a power struggle inspired by the new Netheril. The separatist faction of Bedine desert tribesfolk known as the Sand Kings have long opposed the iron grip of Netheril's restored masters, the Shadovar. Although Sand King tactics are typically limited to hit-and-run skirmishes against Netherese patrols and supply convoys, a faction led by a desert mystic named Ashurta has uncovered a dangerous and far-reaching plot.

The Shadovar seek the secret to reactivating a wide-reaching and powerful portal network centered around a magical location known as the Spiral Gate. Led by a shade captain named Durbela, the Shadovar are dangerously close to reclaiming a secret ritual scroll whose power will reactivate the dead network. If they are successful, the Spiral Gate will give the Shadovar control of countless reactivated portals across Faerûn—and that could be the tipping point in Netheril's quest to become the continent's dominant power.

"The Spiral Gate" is an adventure for five characters of 16th level. It can be played as a stand-alone adventure or can be used as a framework on which to build a longer adventure or a section of your ongoing campaign.

BACKGROUND

In the aftermath of the Spellplague, the portal networks that once made Faerûn synonymous with magical power were shattered. With the breaking of the Weave, most of Faerûn's portals remain inert or unstable, and only the bravest arcanists engage in the dangerous rituals required to bring a dead portal back to life.

This adventure centers around three linked and partially functioning portals, the last of which holds power that Netheril seeks. The Spiral Gate was a legendary portal nexus built around a confluence point of the Weave. Its power extended into a wide network of gates, but they were shut down by the Spellplague like all other portals. Now the Spiral Gate and its network have been all but forgotten. The Shadovar of Netheril, however, have uncovered lost lore that promises to restore the Spiral Gate to power and leave its network under their control.

An ancient ritual scroll holds the secret to restoring and reclaiming the power of the Spiral Gate, and that could potentially tip the balance of power in Faerûn by granting unprecedented mobility to Netherese spies, assassins, and armies. The scroll was divided into four fragments that the Shadovar and their sworn enemies the Sand Kings are desperately searching for. The Netherese seek to reactivate and control the portal; the separatists hope to use the ritual to permanently disable the Spiral Gate and put its power out of Netheril's reach. The characters are caught in the middle and must decide which faction to support—or how to effectively manipulate both sides to their own advantage.

This adventure can take place in any part of Faerûn, but it is best situated in one of the border realms caught up in conflict with Netheril. It begins in a city the heroes are passing through or in which they are resting after their previous adventures.

THE QUESTS

If played as a short adventure, "The Spiral Gate" focuses on the characters' part in the activation or disabling of the master portal and its network. If you expand this adventure, add minor quests as appropriate. Consider making it more difficult for the characters to discover the locations of Encounters T1 and T2 or creating a minor quest around their efforts to establish a detente with the Sand Kings, the Shadovar, or both.

Major Quest—Activate or Destroy the Spiral Gate
Depending on which side of the Shadovar/Sand King conflict the adventurers end up on (or even if they play both sides against one another), their focus in the final encounter is on the activation or destruction of the Spiral Gate and its connected portal network by using the power of the scroll fragments.

Reward: 7,000 XP.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

As the adventure begins, two of the four scroll fragments have been found and are in the possession of the Shadovar and Sand King factions. A squad of Sand King agents in with one fragment targets the party in a crowded marketplace—not because they're looking for a fight but to clandestinely slip the scroll fragment into the heroes' possession. The desperate Sand Kings need to keep the fragment away from a superior force of Shadovar hot on their heels, and they hope that it will be temporarily safe hidden

with a powerful group of adventurers. The attempt to plant the fragment is botched, and the plan goes bad. This opening encounter can be played as a straight-up fight, or the characters can take advantage of an in-combat skill challenge to parlay with this group of strangers. The aftermath of the fight brings the characters face-to-face with the Shadovar and the first hints of the conflict that the party is caught up in.

When the adventurers discover the scroll fragment, they determine the existence of three other fragments and the locations of two of them. They discover that the Shadovar possess the fourth fragment when that group asks their aid against the Sand Kings. At the same time, the Sand Kings ask the party to join them in the fight against Netheril, and the characters are pressured to decide which side of this conflict they are on.

The characters should then travel to the sites where the other scroll fragments are to be found—a ruined merchant's estate and a temple of Mystra fallen and abandoned in the aftermath of the Spellplague. Both of these encounters involve the two NPC factions in a way that depends on the players' decision about who to support in the conflict. "Enemies and Allies" sidebars throughout the adventure discuss how the relationship between the characters and the two opposing factions shapes the encounters.

With the last two scroll fragments retrieved, the final encounters take place within the ruined keystone portal known as the Spiral Gate, which is the center of a network that once crossed Faerûn. This spiral-walled cavern tapped into a potent nexus point of the Weave. The Spiral Gate is already under the control of the Shadovar, who have been clearing and preparing the site in expectation of reclaiming all four scroll fragments. Its entrance is guarded by a force of Netherese shadar-kai, while the portal itself is protected by a pair of thaalud guardians. A final showdown at the portal becomes an all-out battle between the characters, the Shadovar, and the Sand Kings for control of the Spiral Gate.

Preparing for Adventure

The adventure begins during the downtime following the characters' previous adventure. Alternatively, you can connect the characters' presence in the unnamed city to a previously established quest or mission.

If you are starting with a short session, you need only read "Part 1: Marketplace Skirmish" and the accompanying encounter to begin play. The brawl in the market starts things off with a bang, after which the players have plenty of opportunity for roleplaying as they make their first contact with the Shadovar and the Sand Kings.

Adventure Hooks

This adventure starts out with a chance encounter that thrusts the characters into the middle of a conflict not of their making. As such, it needs no formal adventure hooks beyond whatever is necessary to get the characters into a market square of the city they are currently in.

You might, however, wish to establish prior knowledge of (or connections to) the Shadovar and the Sand Kings, especially for players and characters with no direct knowledge of Netheril (see Chapter 6 of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*). Alternatively, the characters can seek such knowledge from local sources in the aftermath of the first encounter, giving you a chance to fill them in.

Adapting the Adventure

To adapt this adventure for parties of more or fewer than five characters, simply add or subtract one or more of the lowest-level creatures in each encounter. Because many of the encounters feature the Sand Kings and the Shadovar fighting alongside and against the characters (see "Everybody In"), stacking one side or the other is an easy way to adjust the overall challenge.

"The Spiral Gate" can be played as a standalone short adventure of five encounters, or it can be used as the framework for a more detailed adventure. The noble's tomb and the ruined temple of Mystra can be expanded to incorporate additional areas and encounters, as can the Spiral Gate itself. If you expand the adventure to more than one level's worth of encounters, be sure to increase the danger of the later encounters accordingly. Either add additional monsters or boost the level of the monsters in the encounters using the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Location, Location, Location

The two portals that yield up fragments of the Spiral Gate's ritual scroll are local to the city in which the adventure starts. (The Sand Kings and the Shadovar have come here for this very reason.) Because the Spiral Gate is accessed by way of the earlier portals, it can be located in any part of Faerûn. If you want to keep the characters in the same area as this adventure, simply place the Spiral Gate in reasonable proximity to the city. However, you can use this adventure as an excuse to radically change the setting of your campaign—especially if the adventure ends with the Spiral Gate and its transit portal permanently disabled, giving the characters no obvious way to return to the city where the adventure started.

Rewards

The characters should accumulate five treasure parcels by the end of this adventure. You can supply these treasures in whatever way you wish, but this list presents the most likely encounters to bear treasure.

During your preparation, assign parcels from those that follow to the encounters in the spaces provided. Use the players' wish lists to come up with magic items for the first two parcels.

Treasure Parcels

Parcel A: _____, T1 (hidden in the rubble or carried by a dead member of the enemy faction).
Parcel B: _____, T2 (lost beneath the altar or carried by a dead member of the enemy faction).
Parcel C: _____, S2 (carried by a dead member of the enemy faction).
Parcel D: _____, S2 (carried by a dead member of the enemy faction).
Parcel E: _____, S2 (carried by a dead member of the enemy faction).

Based on the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the following parcels can be placed in the areas above. These are parcels 2, 3, 6, 7, and 10 from the level 16 list in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Parcel 1: Magic item, level 19
Parcel 2: Magic item, level 18
Parcel 3: Two gem-studded rings (7,500 gp each) + one rough-cut diamond (5,000 gp) + 20 pp*
Parcel 4: Three perfect rubies (5,000 gp each)*
Parcel 5: Two ornate crystal vases (cracked but worth 1,500 gp each) + two *potions of vitality*
* See "Overtures and Intrigues" (page 12) for alternative placement of these parcels.

Experience

The presence of additional enemies and allies in most of the encounters presented here means that the setup and XP values for those encounters are necessarily fluid. This adventure is written to support free decision-making on the players' part and a good amount of improvisation on yours, so be prepared to make adjustments on the fly.

Where an encounter indicates minimum XP, this is the expected XP total if the heroes tackle the encounter by themselves. If they are fighting alongside allies from the Sand Kings or the Shadovar, they face an increased challenge from the enemy faction to compensate. In such a case, calculate overall XP for the encounter to include all enemy-faction creatures slain, then divide that experience evenly among all surviving characters and allied characters. If that process does not yield up the equivalent of the minimum indicated experience divided only among the adventurers, use those numbers instead.

Enemies and Allies

This adventure allows the players to decide who the "bad guys" are. Each encounter has a specific threat that the heroes must square off against. That threat happens within the context of the party's relationship or alliance with the Sand Kings or the Shadovar, and those relationships should play a big role in the characters' actions.

In the Forgotten Realms, the power of reborn Netheril is widely seen as a threat to the stability of Faerûn. A typical approach to this sort of adventure would be for the characters to join forces with the underdog faction to make a stand against the more powerful faction's hunger for even more power. If your players want to take this approach, that's fine, but the adventure doesn't force that alliance on them—and neither should the DM.

Once the existence of the two factions and their goals have been established in the aftermath of Encounter M1, the characters are free to ally with the rebel Sand Kings, throw in their lot with the powerful Shadovar, or even play both sides against the other while seeking the scroll fragments and the power for themselves. Moreover, the characters can pretend allegiance to one group while secretly supporting the other, or can even attempt to change alliances mid-adventure if they want to.

Later sections in this adventure address how the context of an encounter changes depending on which side the adventurers are on. Beyond that, "The Spiral Gate" relies heavily on you and your players' ability to roleplay and on you using your improvisation skills to adjust encounters and bring these complex interactions between the characters and the factions to life.

But What If ... ?

This adventure is designed to give the heroes full flexibility in deciding how to deal with the conflict they find themselves caught in the middle of, so be receptive to any choices the players make in their dealings with the Sand Kings and the Shadovar. In the most extreme case, this opening part of the adventure might see the characters discover the scroll fragment and simply turn it over to the Shadovar with no appreciation of its importance. If this (or anything else unexpected) happens, just run with it.

The above scenario is one in which the Shadovar, grateful for having their work done for them, take even greater initiative in looking to the characters as allies. Like the Sand Kings, they recognize the characters as experienced heroes capable of getting the job done, and they will do whatever they can (including promising the gratitude of a powerful empire) to get the adventurers to accompany them on their search for the missing scroll fragments. Encounters T1 and T2 then revolve around the furious Sand Kings coming after the characters and the Shadovar. Those fights might see the characters becoming more firmly allied with the Shadovar against the Sand Kings, or they might come to understand what the Sand Kings are fighting against, causing them to switch sides.

Everybody In

At various points in the adventure, the characters can end up attacking the members of one faction while they fight alongside the members of the other faction. In most circumstances, the number of NPCs in each faction should equal the number of characters. There are a number of different approaches to handling this expanded roster of NPCs in combat.

Fighting "Off-Screen": The simplest approach is a story-based one, in which NPCs at the periphery of the fight are handled narratively (that is, without bothering to roll dice for their attacks or actions) while the focus remains squarely on the characters. In each fight, victory or defeat is determined entirely by the characters. Even in victory, one or two allies can be lost in each encounter, the same as other expendable party resources. Some might consider this the least 'realistic' option, but it is simple and can still be highly satisfying if your descriptions are colorful.

The Multitasking DM: You can take on the responsibility for running all NPCs, friend and foe, just as you control all the monsters and hazards in any encounter. You can engage in full combat rolls for the members of both factions, letting the dice determine which way the fight skews (and possibly forcing the heroes to come to their allies' aid), or you can simply assume that each NPC attack deals minimum damage against another NPC each round. This gives the players plenty to think about and many more ways to interact with the fight going on around them, but it also places a lot of work on you and can mean long waits between turns for the players.

Allied Forces: The third approach is for you to control all of the characters' enemies but give the players control over their NPC allies. Give the NPC statistics directly to the players. Each player takes an additional turn every round, on a separate initiative point, to resolve their NPCs' actions—see "Companion Characters" from *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* for more information. (These NPCs aren't really companions, but one or two might rise to that position before the adventure is over if players grow attached to them.)

This style of play assumes a certain amount of trust that the players won't treat their NPCs as suicidal melee fodder. If the NPCs are being abused, either discuss your concerns with the players, fall back on one of the two options above, or have the NPCs react in a realistically negative manner.

NPCs of Note

In the course of the adventure, the characters have a chance to interact with members of both NPC factions. Most of the Sand Kings and the Shadovar are baseline warriors and fairly indistinguishable from each other. Give each NPC a name and a bit of distinct flavor and personality using the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* or the backgrounds in *Player's Handbook 2*. In addition, give the players some latitude in developing the personality of any NPCs they control (see "Everybody In," page 8).

Three of the more important characters from each faction are mentioned here. These NPCs have their own statatistics blocks, but those stats can be used for other NPCs as well.

Ashurta (Sand King mystic; human female): The leader of the Sand Kings is a noteworthy tactician whose desert-burned appearance conceals a thoughtful demeanor and a calmly analytical mind. Her parents were Bedine nomads slain by a Shadovar patrol when she was a child. In all the years since, Ashurta has dedicated her life to thwarting the ambitions of the new Netheril's rulers.

Murrai (Sand King stormlord; human male): Ashurta's second-in-command is a rash and impulsive counterpart to her slow and careful leadership style. A mercenary by trade and nature, Murrai fights with the Sand Kings for the sheer joy of conflict, claiming personal reasons for hating the Shadovar that change on a day-to-day basis.

Yeri (Sand King freeblade; human female): A seasoned veteran of countless desert campaigns, Yeri looks on each fight as her last. She throws herself into combat with a fatalistic frenzy that has tipped the odds in her favor more than once, but which often puts her allies in peril.

Durbela (Shadovar shadow captain; human male shade*): Durbela, the leader of the Shadovar, is a battle-hardened veteran whose appearance is as unpleasant as his initial demeanor. His manner softens with those who express allegiance to the new Netheril, and his loyalty to his allies is absolute—almost. In the end, he serves Netheril and is under strict orders to eliminate all threats to the Shadovar's plans.

Durbela has become a shade only recently, as a reward for his service to Netheril. His appearance has not yet begun to transform, as is normal for those creatures.

**Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*, page 60.

Nulu (Shadovar squadmaster; human female): Nulu has been the point warrior for countless Shadovar strike teams under Durbela's command. Vengeful, fearless, and sadistic to a fault, only Durbela's orders keep her thirst for battle in check.

Kungeya (Shadovar shadow knight; human male): One of the more ambitious warriors under Durbela's current command is Kungeya, who consistently seeks out the weakest opponents in combat. He covets the trust Durbela extends to Nulu,and looks for ways to show up the squadmaster.

Chain of Command

The number of overall Shadovar and Sand Kings in the adventure is kept intentionally loose by Durbela's talk of "similar numbers" (see "Calling All Heroes," page 12). The idea is that even if one or both factions are wiped out cleanly in any encounter, more can come in to take their place. However, don't simply regenerate identical numbers of allies and foes each time. Instead, have the characters observe enemy squads following them at a distance, allies sending couriers with requests to regroup, and so on.

If Ashurta is killed in the course of the adventure, Murrai takes command of the remaining Sand Kings. If Murrai is killed, the Sand Kings are effectively leaderless, but their rebuilt squads fight the Shadovar (and the adventurers, if they've allied with Durbela) to the death.

If Durbela is killed, Nula takes command of the Shadovar, who fight with increased fury. If Nula is subsequently killed, any surviving Shadovar immediately break off combat and flee the current encounter. From then on, the Shadovar concentrate on preventing the permanent disabling of the Spiral Gate. They reappear only during Encounter S2. By focusing on destroying the Shadovar early, the characters can gain an advantage in intervening encounters.

Part 1: Marketplace Skirmish

This adventure kicks off with an unexpected combat in the heart of an urban bazaar. The characters should get no warning that the encounter with the Sand Kings is imminent. If possible, send them to the market on some specific mission or by using an adventurer's desire to purchase new gear with the spoils of a previous adventure.

Whatever business brings the characters to the city, make sure that their presence as paragon heroes does not go unnoticed. (If their recent adventures have brought them specific local notoriety, so much the better.)

As it has throughout the city, your presence in the bazaar attracts attention. More than one vendor proudly calls out with an offer of "Great discounts for great heroes!" Other folk catch your eye as you pass through the tightly packed courtyard of colorful stalls, their whispers telling you that they know you by reputation if not by name.

The recognition of the characters as powerful adventurers is key to the Sand Kings' spur-of-the-moment plan to hide their scroll fragment with the party. Unfortunately, none of these Sand Kings (currently on the run from the Shadovar) have much in the way of Thievery skill, so the tactical encounter is triggered when the attempt is botched. If you want an added reason to start a brawl, the on-the-run and low-on-resources Sand King could succumb to temptation and help himself to the character's purse or some other valuable.

The shrouded blade intent on hiding the fragment looks for the character likely to have the worst Perception check, which translates in his mind as the best-armored fighter, paladin, or other warrior. Alternatively, pick the adventurer with the most hair-trigger temper as a means of kicking things off.

Read or paraphrase the following to the target of the sleight of hand attempt:

The close bustle of the market crowd just took on a more personal touch—you feel pressure at your waist. Glancing down, you see a hand slipping out from your pack with your purse tight in its grasp. The figure attached to the arm is lean and sun-dark—Netherese by his look. When he glances up and sees your eyes on him, he snarls and darts back. A dagger suddenly appears in his hand as he drops into an attack stance.

As soon as his actions are noted, the unfortunate Sand King panics and attacks the chosen character (or anyone else who raises a hue and cry). The other Sand Kings join the melee starting in the second round.

If a fight breaks out, see tactical encounter M1: Marketplace Skirmish.

In this encounter, the adventurers and their foes don't necessarily have contrary objectives that lead inevitably to a fight to the death. Bad timing and circumstance create the initial conflict between the Sand Kings and the characters, but that brief confrontation can unfold in different ways.

A brawl with the characters is not a fight that the Sand Kings would ever choose to engage in. The decision to plant one of the scroll fragments on the heroes was a desperation play inspired by the knowledge that a superior force of the Sand Kings' mortal enemies is about to strike. The characters are clearly a more formidable group than the Shadovar who are pursuing the Sand Kings, so the Sand Kings hope that the scroll fragment will be safe for the short term if it is secretly stashed on one of the characters. The shrouded blade who precipitates the attack is scared and desperate, and the other Sand Kings are far enough away in the crowd that they don't see what sets off the altercation. All they're aware of is that one of their number is under attack by people they were hoping would distract the Shadovar. They might leap to the conclusion that the adventurers have recognized them—or even that this randomly chosen group is already allied with the Shadovar.

Rewards

If the heroes take the fight through to the end of the encounter, award full XP for any Sand Kings who escape or who are slain or subdued.

If the characters persuade the Sand Kings to stand down, award XP for the skill challenge and for any Sand Kings slain or subdued before the challenge was completed. If this total XP does not equal or exceed the XP total noted at the top of the encounter, allow a roleplaying XP reward to make up the difference.

If the characters succeed at the skill challenge but then decide to cut down the Sand Kings anyway, feel free to not award additional combat XP or to have the surviving Sand Kings simply flee. (Such bloodthirsty and untrustworthy behavior will have an extremely negative impact on any further dealings with the Sand Kings.)

After the Fight

If the characters routed the Sand Kings and allowed the survivors to flee, they are left to wonder what caused the altercation for a few minutes before the Shadovar arrive. Any dead Sand Kings carry nothing of interest, and a search of their bodies yields up only that these are desert folk fresh from the road. (If the heroes have time to use Speak with Dead later on, incorporate that into the information they gain regarding the scroll fragment.)

The merchants who slowly return to the market do not know who the Sand Kings were, though a helpful farmer reports seeing the group come through the city gates in a great hurry only a few minutes before the fight began.

If the characters manage to get the Sand Kings to stand down from combat, one of them quickly steps forward to speak. (Use Murrai or Yeri for this purpose; see "NPCs of Note" on page 8. Ashurta is not with this group yet; her absence is what inspired the somewhat desperate plan to hide the scroll fragment on the adventurers.) **Read the following aloud:**

Shouts echo in the distance as the frantic merchants and farmers who fled the bazaar call for the city guard. The weathered warrior who steps forward glances around warily. "This could have gone easier, I wager. Sorry for the trouble."

The Sand Kings are annoyingly circumspect in response to any questions, offering up only that they are "travelers from the desert—the Bedine," and apologizing for "the misunderstanding." Their only goal in the aftermath of combat is to get away before the Shadovar arrive. **Read the following aloud:**

As a shout comes from a nearby street, the remaining warriors turn as one. "Until next time," the speaker says with a thin smile, and then all the desert folk are running.

The Sand Kings leave their dead on the ground and head off down a deserted alleyway, where they quickly disappear from sight. If the characters try to follow, have the arrival of the Shadovar interrupt them.

Shadovar Arrival

Just a few minutes after the fight in the bazaar, another group of strangers enters the ransacked market—the Shadovar. **Read the following aloud:**

With a shout, a half-dozen well-armed figures run into the bazaar from one of its many side streets. Their faded and dusty cloaks grant them a passing resemblance to the warriors you just fought, but each wears the uniform of Netheril and a night-black armband with an insignia of rank on it. A wind-burned warrior leads them, and a pack of city guards geves these newcomers a healthy amount of distance.

The city guards are clearly intimidated by the Shadovar, who have just arrived in the city hard on the heels of the Sand Kings. Their Captain is Durbela, who approaches the characters. **Read the following aloud:**

The leader who approaches has seen his share of battles. His cold eyes stare out of a face like old leather. "The farmers who just fled past us spoke of an altercation here—a group of mercenaries facing off against a band of desert vagabonds. What might you know of this?"

The Shadovar have no idea that the heroes have the scroll fragment and have no reason to suspect that the Sand Kings temporarily disposed of it the way they did. Even if the characters are completely forthcoming as to how the fight started, Durbela assumes that the desperate Sand Kings were trying to steal from the characters. The idea that they would cast off their precious scroll fragment even temporarily does not occur to him (which was the point of the Sand Kings' spur-of-the-moment plan).

Durbela is interested only in where the Sand Kings might have gone, and he has little interest in the characters' business once he discovers that know nothing useful about his quarry. Any Insight check made against Durbela or his troops tells the adventurers that these are hardened warriors on an urgent mission. If the characters engage the Shadovar leader with Bluff or Diplomacy (DC 20) or with an honest expression of allegiance to Netheril, he takes the time to lay out the broad strokes of their mission.

Durbela

Read the following aloud:

"We pursue the Sand Kings—separatist fanatics attempting to hold the Empire of Netheril hostage in the name of a lost way of life. Desert rats and murderous rabble, the lot of them. But they have stolen something of the Shadovar's, and we mean to see it returned."

Alternatively, the characters can discover the same information with three DC 15 Gather Information checks made later in the city.

The Scroll Fragment

If the adventurer who was targeted as the plant for the scroll fragment doesn't immediately search his or her pack after the fight, Durbela speaking of the Sand Kings as thieves might inspire such action. A thorough check shows that nothing was removed (or perhaps something was, if the DM prefers; losing a valuable item may encourage the characters to get involved by pursuing the thief). In either case, a mysterious addition to the character's gear is discovered.

Read the following aloud:

Tucked into the bottom of your pack is a thing you've never seen before—a tightly sewn, flat pouch of vellum, no larger than your hand and sealed with a brass clasp.

When opened, the pouch reveals the scroll fragment.

It is a well-worn piece of folded parchment, darkened by age and roughly torn along two sides as if it might have been a piece of a larger scroll. Writing fills the parchment—a tightly cramped script in red-black ink. Even to a casual glance, this is clearly a fragment of a ritual scroll, but so much is missing that its meaning and purpose are difficult to determine.

It takes a day's study of the fragment and two DC 25 Arcana checks to determine that it is one part of a unique and powerful ritual by which a portal known as the Spiral Gate was once activated. The scroll fragments are artifact-level magic and cannot be harmed or destroyed by any power available to the characters.

With two more DC 25 Arcana or History checks, the characters learn the information regarding the Spiral Gate in the "Background" section (page 5) and that two of the many portal sites that once connected to the Spiral Gate stand within a day's ride of the city.

With another day's research in the city and three DC 20 Gather Information checks, the heroes learn the information in the "Background" section regarding Netheril's interest in finding the Spiral Gate and the locations of the two local portals.

One portal was privately held by a local merchant lord named Mutashi, whose fortunes fell some years ago. His estate lies in thoroughly looted ruins to the east of the city. The locals avoid the site thanks to rumors of protective magic and fell beasts living there.

The second portal is said to have stood within a temple of Mystra to the west of the city. It fell during the Spellplague, and its ruins, too, are now shunned.

Overtures and Intrigues

The characters have no direct knowledge that the missing scroll fragments are hidden at the two local portals, but that information is provided by an unexpected meeting a short time after the characters learn the information above.

Calling All Heroes

The Shadovar captain Durbela easily tracks down the characters as a result of their notoriety. Work his approach into whatever location the adventurers are currently at, as he tells them he has heard how effectively they took on the Sand Kings in the bazaar. This can happen immediately after the fight in the bazaar, after the characters have researched the scroll fragment, or any other time deemed appropriate. **At that time, read the following aloud:**

"If you would like a chance to respond to the insult of their attack, I offer you an opportunity. We have reason to believe that the militants seek something in a ruin a short distance from the city. We also have indications that they have been joined by others of their foul order—at least three squads' worth against similar numbers of our own forces that seek them even now. The Sand Kings possess a fragment of a powerful scroll, which matches a fragment already in our possession. They seek two more similar pieces, but they cannot be allowed to gain them. We could use your aid, and will pay well for it."

Durbela offers the characters treasure parcel 4 for their services if they will join with the Shadovar. If the characters decline, he expresses his regrets but accepts their decision. (Durbela will cheerfully betray the heroes later if they ally with him; see Part 4: The Transit Portal. For now, however, he has no reason to suspect that the characters are on the Sand Kings' side or that they have the scroll fragment, unless they showed it to him.)

Insight Check

DC 20: *The Shadovar leader carries himself with the cool detachment of a career military officer with a strong sense of honor. His offer is an honest one.*

DC 25: *There is an undercurrent of disdain in his manner that gives you pause. This is a warrior wholly dedicated to his masters. Although his offer is genuine, the Shadovar leader is not to be wholly trusted.*

If the characters join with Durbela and the Shadovar, they head out the following day for tactical encounter T1: Mutashi's tomb.

My Scroll, Please?

The Sand Kings, who are yet hiding out in the city, also have no problem getting close to the adventurers thanks to the party's notoriety (which has only increased as a result of the dust-up in the bazaar). The Sand Kings are keeping a cautious eye on them, and Ashurta, their leader, may come to the characters a few hours after the meeting with Durbela. (Remember that the characters have not met Ashurta yet. She and a number of new Sand Kings arrived in the city after the initial encounter.) Work Ashurta's approach into whatever location the characters are at, and **paraphrase the following as necessary.**

A woman approaches, drawing back the hood of her cloak to reveal a face tanned nut-brown by the sun and wind. Her piercing blue eyes take you in as she nods in greeting, her movements revealing a scorpion tattoo at her neck. "Sorry to disturb you," she says, "but I believe you have something that belongs to me. I thank you for holding it, but I must ask its return."

Ashurta

Ashurta is honestly apologetic as she explains the reasons behind the altercation in the bazaar and that "such a thing would not have happened had I been here." She then makes a plea to the heroes for support for the Sand King cause, describing the faction's fight against the "corrupt and murderous reign" of the Shadovar. (Use this conversation as an opportunity to introduce backstory elements regarding Netheril.)

Ashurta offers the rough-cut diamond from treasure parcel 3 in exchange for the scroll fragment planted on the characters, then offers the remainder of that parcel for the party's aid in helping the Sand Kings to retrieve the other fragments.

If the characters have already given the scroll fragment to the Shadovar, Ashurta is noticeably distressed. She does not blame them; her own soldiers are ultimately at fault. She becomes even more anxious, however, to secure the other fragments with the characters' aid.

If the characters join with Ashurta and the Sand Kings, they head out the following day for tactical encounter T1: Mutashi's tomb.

The Old Double-Cross

Ashurta has no way of knowing that the heroes met with Durbela. It is entirely possible that the characters will end up agreeing to help Durbela, then be swayed to switch their allegiance by Ashurta's plea. The players can decide whether the characters simply choose to go with the Sand Kings and leave the Shadovar in the lurch, or whether they pretend to go out in support of the Shadovar in Encounter T1 and then double-cross them during the fight with the Sand Kings. Likewise, nothing prevents the characters from feigning allegiance to Ashurta as a means of setting up the Sand Kings to be taken by Durbela and his troops.

In either event, adjust the setup of Encounters T1 and T2 as noted in those encounters.

None of the Above

The adventurers are entirely free to reject the overtures of both the Sand Kings and the Shadovar. In that case, use Durbela's mention of the ruins a short distance from the city (which ties to what the characters previously learned in "The Scroll Fragment") to get them on their way.

If the characters are inclined to ask after either of the factions before making plans, two DC 20 Gather Information checks at the city gates the next day reveal that the Shadovar headed east out of the city (toward Encounter T1) an hour earlier. Two DC 25 Gather Information checks reveal that the Sand Kings also headed east an hour before that, and that the Shadovar were following them. (In fact, the Sand Kings doubled back and headed west toward Encounter T2.)

With no faction to follow, the heroes can choose to undertake either Encounter T1 or Encounter T2 first.

Part 2: Mutashi's Tomb

This estate of a rich merchant lord fell into ruin in the aftermath of the Spellplague. The upper ruins have long since been scoured clean, but the locals steer clear of the estate's underground tomb where the portal is hidden.

If the characters undertake this encounter prior to encounter T2, they catch their first sight of the ruined estate as they approach overland.

A crumbling wall marks the boundary of a once-rich merchant's estate, but all lies in ruin now. A moss-covered stone archway leads to an overgrown boulevard of dead trees. A great manor house rises beyond, but its windows are sealed behind rotting shutters, like blind eyes in a blank face.

If the characters arrive here by way of the portal in Encounter T2, they probably expect to be teleported from that portal to the door portal in the tomb. However, the instability of the power connecting these portals sends them slightly off course. **In that case, read the following aloud:**

The tomb you saw through the archway suddenly melts away before you as something tears at you like a scouring wind. With a lurch, you find yourselves outside and tumbling to the rocky ground. The outer wall of a ruined estate looms up beside you; a desolate and deserted manor house stands a short distance off.

A DC 20 Arcana check determines that the unstable connection between the portals is responsible for the rough landing and that the portal the adventurers should have teleported to is somewhere within the ruins.

If you are using this adventure as a framework on which to hang additional encounters, the ruins of Mutashi's estate can hide any number of monstrous or magical challenges. Remember that one faction or the other will have previously fought its way into the manor house, so show signs of combat (and a few dead monsters) as the characters approach.

Like the estate itself, the upper levels of the manor house feature no encounters unless you add them. Encounters or no, the place has a sinister appearance.

Even before its fall, this once-palatial manor must have been an unsettling sight. Beyond the fallen front doors, high walls are tiled in black slate panels split and cracked by exposure to the open air. Even where the shutters have fallen, narrow window slits let in only a haze of shadowy light. That light is enough to reveal footprints in the dust and rubble strewn across the wooden panels of the uneven floor. A stone doorway on the far side of a wide great hall has been cracked open, revealing a flight of stairs leading down.

Perception Check
DC 20: *Faint voices can be heard from down the stairs.*
DC 25: *The wooden floor is dangerously weakened by years of rot. The previous passage of whoever made the footprints almost caused it to collapse, and you must tread carefully to avoid doing so yourselves.*

If the characters do not make the second Perception check, each character passing through the area must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check as the floor suddenly pitches and crumbles beneath them. On a failed check, a character falls 30 feet into the chamber below.

If the collapsing floor is not triggered, the heroes and any allies can descend the stairs. Any characters on the stairs must make Stealth checks against the enemy faction's passive Perception 25.

The encounter is a magical-hazard scenario complicated by an altercation with one of the NPC factions.

Enemies and Allies

If the characters have chosen one faction to ally with, they arrive at the encounter with that faction. The enemy faction is already here, and engaged in searching the tomb for the scroll fragment. The number of NPCs in each faction should equal the number of adventurers. See pages 18-21 for Sand King and Shadovar statistics blocks.

If the characters are feigning allegiance to one faction or the other, use the same setup as above. At some point, however, the characters are likely to turn on their supposed allies to fight alongside the "enemies" already here.

If the heroes have not allied with either faction, the Shadovar are the enemy faction here, and the characters fight them alone. Set up a number of Shadovar equal to the number of characters in the party and yielding the appropriate experience.

See tactical encounter T1: Mutashi's Tomb.

The Scroll Fragment

The scroll fragment is concealed behind the totem-mosaic of the hunting hound on the fallen door—that is, the fragment was placed in a shallow niche in the door and then the mosaic was inlaid over it. A corner of the parchment is exposed through a crack in the door; it is noticed with a DC 25 Perception check on a general search of the room, or automatically if the door is lifted by a corner (Strength check, DC 22) or turned over (Strength check, DC 31). The parchment can be retrieved easily if the door is turned over, or by spending 20 minutes carefully chipping away the stone.

The Ruined Portal

Investigating the doorway reveals that it is the portal at this site. The portal was badly damaged when the door was torn down, and it cannot be reactivated by any normal means. However, a character in possession of one of the scroll fragments can use a Linked Portal ritual to partially restore the portal's power. (If none of the characters has access to the ritual, one of their allies does, or they find a ritual scroll on one of the dead.)

If the characters restore this portal before the portal in Encounter T2, it connects to the ruined temple of Mystra. However, the character who performs the ritual becomes aware that the portal also has a dormant connection to the Spiral Gate, which will be reestablished if both portals are activated. Use the area description in Encounter T2 to tell the players what they see through the portal, or let a character make a DC 20 Arcana check to confirm the portal's destination.

If the heroes restore this portal after restoring the portal in Encounter T2, they establish a connection to the Spiral Gate. See "The Transit Portal" on page 15 for more information.

Part 3: Temple of Mystra

The ruined temple that houses the second portal has been corrupted by darkness and shadow so that now it is occupied by a pack of banderhobbs.

If the characters undertake this encounter prior to Encounter T1, their first sight of the temple comes as they approach it along a long disused road.

In the distance stand the ruins of a temple—a steep rise of rocky ground strewn with thorn scrub and topped by bleached walls of weathered stone.

If the characters arrive here by way of the portal in Encounter T1, they should be teleported from that portal to the portal arch in the altar chamber. However, the instability of the power connecting these portals interrupts their transit.

A quick flash of the ruined shrine fills your mind, but then a wave of force smashes through you as the world blurs away. You find yourself outside, sprawled hard on rocky ground. A short distance away stand the bleached, silent walls of a ruined temple.

A DC 20 Arcana check reveals that the unstable connection between the portals is responsible for the rough landing, and that the portal the adventurers should have teleported to is somewhere within the ruins. They can approach the temple without further incident.

The condition of the ruins suggests that it was much more than the passage of time that brought this temple down. The stones here are charred and blasted as if by great heat, even as their adjacent timbers show no signs of damage. The seven stars of Mystra are scribed over the ruin's shattered front doors. Beyond them, darkness looms.

Recently-made, humanoid footprints approach the temple from the road, but these appear to simply circle the ruins before retreating again into the surrounding rocks and scrub. Other tracks mark the threshold of the doorway—the clawed footprints of at least three massive creatures. These tracks are older but still recent, clearly showing that something has entered and left the temple ruins on numerous occasions.

Perception Check
DC 20: *The darkness beyond the doors has an unnatural quality and seems to drift and roil like smoke as you stare.*

The clawed tracks mark where the banderhobbs have entered and left the temple. The humanoid tracks are those of the enemy faction, who earlier approached the ruined temple but did not enter it, cautious of what lies within and hoping that the other faction arrives here and will clear out the threat.

This encounter assumes that the enemy faction has withdrawn to a location where they can see the characters enter the temple, then follow. If you are expanding the adventure, consider adding a skill challenge and an outdoor encounter if the characters want to track down the enemy faction first.

Roiling Darkness

The power of the Shadowfell has corrupted this once holy site, filling its empty chambers with a roiling darkness that inspired the banderhobbs to lair here. As the heroes enter the first chamber, they note its effects.

Shadow swirls around you like something alive, swallowing any light brought to bear against it. From the corner of your eye comes sudden movement—but when you turn quickly, you see nothing there.

The unnatural shadow here negates any mundane light source. Magical light sources shed only dim light in all areas of the temple.

Into the Temple

The two initial areas of the temple contain only rubble and darkness. Let the characters investigate cautiously. They should not know that there is no danger here.

In the temple's innermost chamber, the characters face off against the pack of banderhobbs. If the party has come here with an allied faction, the fight is complicated partway through by the arrival of the enemy faction.

See tactical encounter T2: The Temple of Mystra.

The Scroll Fragment

The scroll fragment here is hidden within a secret compartment behind the middle star of the altar's capstone. It can be spotted with a DC 31 Perception check during a general search of the room or a DC 20 Perception check if the altar is searched specifically. The compartment can be opened with a DC 25 Thievery check or the stone can be shattered with a DC 25 Strength check.

The Ruined Portal

The portal arch here once connected to other temples of Mystra, but its power was corrupted and broken when the destruction of the Weave brought down this temple. It cannot be reactivated normally. However, a character in possession of one of the scroll fragments can use a Linked Portal ritual to partially restore the portal's power. (If none of the heroes has access to the ritual, one of their allies does or they find a ritual scroll on one of the dead.)

If the characters restore this portal before the portal in Encounter T1, it connects to the ruins of the noble's estate. In that case, the character who performs the ritual becomes aware that the portal also has a dormant connection to the Spiral Gate, which will be reestablished if both portals are activated. Use the area description in Encounter T1 to tell the players what they see through the portal, or let a character make a DC 20 Arcana check to confirm the portal's destination.

If the characters restore this portal after restoring the portal in Encounter T1, they establish a connection to the Spiral Gate. See "The Transit Portal" below for more information.

Part 4: The Transit Portal

The focus of the Shadovar's plots is the Spiral Gate, an ancient portal built on a nexus point of the Weave. The portal was once the site of a powerful confluence of arcane and planar energy, but it has been crippled in the aftermath of the Spellplague like so many of the portals of Faerûn. The Shadovar know that if they can reactivate this central link, they may be able to regain control of many other portals across the world.

All four scroll fragments will have been claimed in the aftermath of the previous encounters, though which factions possess which fragments depends on how the encounters played out and how the adventurers positioned themselves in the conflict between the Shadovar and the Sand Kings.

The activation of both portals in Encounters T1 and T2 reestablishes a dormant connection between both of those portals and a transit portal above the cavern that houses the Spiral Gate. (This already-active transit portal also connects to locations in Netheril and is the means by which the Shadovar first accessed the Spiral Gate cavern.)

When the second portal is activated, a vague glimpse of what lies beyond can be seen. **Read the following aloud:**

A sudden pulse of white light is replaced by a shimmer of gloom marking the far side of the portal connection. A small with rough stone walls can barely be seen.

When the characters step through the arch, they find themselves in a rough stone chamber with a single exit. A portal arch set into the wall can return them safely to either Mutashi's tomb or the ruined temple of Mystra at any time. The chamber's only physical exit is a rough stone passageway that runs a hundred paces or so before emerging at the ledge in Encounter S1.

(Access to the powerful Spiral Gate was once strictly controlled by forcing creatures to first pass through this portal, then through the wards of the shadow chasm, then through the second portal that was the final access point to the gate. Depending on where you decide to place the Spiral Gate in your campaign, this entrance chamber can also have a secret exit leading to the surface or to some other site.)

Preventing Pursuit

In activating this portal, the characters know that a connection will persist between this location and both the temple of Mystra and Mutashi's tomb. Whether the heroes are allied with one faction or none, it is impossible to prevent the Shadovar or the Sand Kings from using the transit portal to pursue the party. The characters can hinder pursuers by making a total of three DC 22 Arcana, Athletics, Religion, or Thievery checks to disrupt the operation of the transit portal. For each successful check, pursuers are delayed by 1 round before entering combat in encounter S2. See that encounter for details.

The Shadow Chasm

The Shadovar have been working in this area for some time to open a temporary physical access to the Spiral Gate and clear the rubble that buried it in the aftermath of the Spell Plague. Retrieving the four scroll fragments is the last and most important step in their effort to bring the Spiral Gate back to life. To that end, a force of Netherese shadar-kai have been laboring here for some weeks, directing the work of the thaaluds (see tactical encounter S2) and preparing the portal for the ritual that will reactivate it.

See tactical encounter S1: Shadow Chasm.

Aftermath

Any shadar-kai left alive for questioning will grudgingly detail their purpose here (or the adventurers can use Speak With Dead to gain the same information). Shadar-kai given their freedom after questioning will offer up information regarding the preparations they have made to reactivate the Spiral Gate. This grants a +2 bonus to the first check made in the skill challenge in Encounter S2.

The lower tier once housed a portal archway that linked to the hidden Spiral Gate below. With that portal destroyed, the Shadovar have had to open up an alternate access. **Read the following aloud:**

Telltale sigils mark this crumbling archway as a portal, but no sign of its magic remains now. The rocky ground before it has been torn open by great force, and recently. A crumbling chasm 10 feet across leads down into darkness.

Descending through the portal chasm leads to the Spiral Gate and the final encounter of the adventure.

Part 5: The Spiral Gate

When characters enter the chasm in tactical encounter S1, they descend 100 feet down a narrow, rough-cut, steeply sloping tunnel. (The thaaluds in this encounter were created in the cavern below; only the Shadovar pass this way.)

When the heroes approach the end of the tunnel, read the following aloud:

Ahead, the floor of the tunnel suddenly slopes away where a huge cavern opens up into shadow. The far side of the cavern cannot be seen in the darkness, but its near wall appears to have been naturally eroded as a sloping, rubble-strewn ledge which plunges steadily downward. The cavern narrows as the ledge twists around it in an enormous spiral.

Perception Check
DC 27: *The intermittent grinding of stone can be heard echoing from the darkness below.*

If they proceed with caution, the characters make their way down the spiral ledge without difficulty.

When the characters have descended to the edge of the tactical map and within sight of the cavern floor, read:

The spiral ledge trails down to a broad cavern strewn with piles of rubble showing signs of recent excavation. At the center of the cavern stands the archway of a great portal. Its stones are carved in disturbing spiral patterns that glow faintly.

The thaalud guardians are a potent challenge in and of themselves. However, that challenge is complicated by the addition of the Sand Kings and the Shadovar.

If the characters are allied with one faction or the other, any allies that survived Encounter S1 are with them here. (Unlike previous encounters, allied losses are not replaced here.) In addition, an enemy faction pursuing the characters comes through the transit portal shortly after the combat in tactical encounter S1 is finished. These enemies carefully follow the heroes down the portal chasm and normally enter this combat 3 rounds after it begins. That time frame can be adjusted if the characters tried to disrupt the operation of the transit portal (see "Preventing Pursuit," page 16).

During the combat, as long as two or more of the scroll fragments are physically present within the chamber, any group can attempt the skill challenge to permanently activate or disable the Spiral Gate—either working in concert with or against each other. See the skill challenge for details.

How the action in this final encounter plays out depends on how the characters have proceeded so far, and who their allegiance lies with. At the very least, the adventurers will face off in the skill challenge against the enemy faction that arrives after the fight begins. However, especially if that entrance is delayed, quick-thinking characters might be able to complete the skill challenge before the enemy faction's arrival. In this event, award the characters 1,400 XP as a story reward. The enemy faction then focuses simply on killing the heroes for having thwarted their plans.

Arcana Check
DC 18: *Arcane magic pulses within the portal, though it remains inactive. This spiral cavern was once a powerful nexus point of the Weave, but it retains a formidable level of power even still.*
The cavern was all but buried under rubble when the Shadovar discovered it. A pair of thaaluds were created here first to excavate, then to guard the Spiral Gate.

When the first adventurer advances off the ledge and into the cavern, read:

The sound of grinding stone heralds sudden movement across the chamber. Two enormous creatures of rock and stone shed loose rubble as they rise, each wielding a great stone maul. Their heads are featureless stone, but a great howling maw opens in each of the creatures' chests.

See tactical encounter S2: The Spiral Gate.

CONCLUSION

In the final encounter, the Spiral Gate is permanently activated or deactivated, depending on the outcome of the combat and the skill challenge. Once this is accomplished, the scroll fragments are drained of their energy and the portal's state cannot be changed by any magic or power available to the characters. (If you wish, it might still be possible to destroy the portal with physical and magical attacks.) In the aftermath of the adventure, the state of the Spiral Gate creates a jumping-off point for further developments in the campaign.

If the portal is destroyed, the characters will have made deadly enemies of the lords of Netheril. If the Shadovar managed to activate the Spiral Gate during the final encounter (even if they were subsequently wiped out by the characters), it gives the Princes of Shade a huge advantage in their plots and can potentially tip the balance of power in Faerûn. You can use this as an opportunity to dial up the political tension or even to involve the adventurers in subsequent efforts (with or without the Sand Kings' assistance) to attack the portal network with an eye to destroying it permanently.

If the characters take control of the portal themselves, it provides you with a great tool for the later paragon and epic tiers. With even an occasionally malfunctioning network at their disposal (and with the locations of the Spiral Gate's other connected portals left to your determination), the characters have access to adventure hooks across the breadth and width of Faerûn.

About the Author

Scott Fitzgerald Gray (9th-level layabout, vindictive neutral) started gaming in high school and has worked as a writer and editor much of the time since then. After belatedly realizing he could combine both vocations in 2004, he's been making up for lost time as a freelance RPG editor and designer, primarily for Wizards of the Coast. He lives in the Canadian hinterland with a schoolteacher, two daughters, and a large number of animal companions.

THE SAND KINGS

Sand King Tactics

A Sand King mystic leads with *mystic storm*, pushing enemies into vulnerable positions and leaving them dazed for its allies' followup attacks. It uses *crush the will* as often as possible against a defender or striker and uses *rattled mind* against an enemy who specifically targets the mystic.

A Sand King stormlord uses *Anauroch storm* against a defender or striker, falling back on *fire wind* attacks while that power recharges. It tries to engage bloodied foes as the battle wears on, hoping to take maximum advantage of its *stormlord's shield*.

A shrouded blade uses *crippling strike* against lightly armored foes, focusing followup attacks on enemies knocked prone. If pressed in melee, it uses *shifting strike* to slip away.

A Sand King freeblade makes *veil of blood* attacks whenever possible, focusing its followup attacks on a blinded foe. It uses *veil of blood* to assess the Fortitude of its enemies before deciding who to target with *on your knees*. A freeblade stays in the thick of combat to maximize the effect of its *last stand*.

Sand King Mystic **Level 16 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human **XP 1,400**

HP 156; **Bloodied** 78 **Initiative** +11
AC 30, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29 **Perception** +20
Speed 6

Traits

☼ **Mystic Bond** ✦ **Aura** 5
Each ally within the aura gains a +2 bonus to saving throws.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Rattled Mind** (implement, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against the mystic until the end of the mystic's next turn.

Crush the Will (implement, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +18 vs. Will
Hit: 2d10 + 12 psychic damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws (save ends all).

Mystic Storm (healing, implement, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +18 vs. Will
Hit: 3d6 + 10 psychic damage, the mystic pushes the target 3 squares, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Effect: Each ally in the burst regains 10 hit points and can shift 3 squares as a free action.

Triggered Actions

Shifting Sand ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger (Immediate Reaction): The mystic is missed by a melee attack)
Effect: The mystic shifts 2 squares and gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn.

Skills Arcana +19, Insight +20, Religion +19

Str 15 (+10)	**Dex** 16 (+11)	**Wis** 24 (+15)
Con 20 (+13)	**Int** 22 (+14)	**Cha** 15 (+10)

Alignment unaligned
Languages Chondathan, Common, Damaran, Netherese
Equipment leather armor, orb

Sand King Stormlord **Level 16 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human **XP 1,400**

HP 121; **Bloodied** 60 **Initiative** +11
AC 28, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29 **Perception** +10
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Dagger** (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage plus 2d6 fire damage.

Fire Wind (fire, implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +23 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 5 fire damage.

Anauroch Storm (fire) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +23 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).
Effect: While the target is taking ongoing damage from this power, the stormlord has concealment against the target.

Triggered Actions

Stormlord's Shield (fire) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger (immediate interrupt): The stormlord is hit by a melee or ranged attack.
Effect: The stormlord takes half damage from the triggering attack, and the attacker takes 15 fire damage.

Skills Arcana +18

Str 13 (+9)	**Dex** 17 (+11)	**Wis** 15 (+10)
Con 19 (+12)	**Int** 20 (+13)	**Cha** 23 (+14)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Netherese
Equipment leather armor, dagger

Sand King Shrouded Blade **Level 15 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human **XP 1,200**

HP 147; **Bloodied** 73 **Initiative** +15
AC 29 (31 against opportunity attacks), **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 27 **Perception** +13
Speed 6

Traits

Combat Advantage
A shrouded blade deals 1d8 extra damage to any creature granting combat advantage to it.

Standard Actions

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 10 damage.

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5/10 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 10 damage.

Shifting Strike (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The shrouded blade uses *dagger* twice. It can shift 1 square before or after each attack.

Crippling Strike (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Effect: The shrouded blade uses *dagger* twice. If either attack hits, the target is also slowed (save ends). If both attacks hit the same target, the target is instead also knocked prone and cannot stand up (save ends).

Skills Acrobatics +18, Bluff +17, Stealth +18
Str 15 (+9) **Dex** 22 (+13) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 19 (+11) **Int** 14 (+9) **Cha** 20 (+12)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Netherese
Equipment leather armor, 6 daggers

Sand King Freeblade **Level 14 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human **XP 1,000**

HP 138; **Bloodied** 69 **Initiative** +13
AC 30, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 25 **Perception** +11
Speed 6

Traits

Fighting Focus ✦ **Aura** 1
Each enemy that starts its turn within the aura is marked until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage.

Veil of Blood (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and is blinded (save ends both).

On Your Knees (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d8 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone and cannot stand up (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Last Stand (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The freeblade is reduced to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (enemies in burst); +19 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.

Skills Acrobatics +16, Athletics +18
Str 22 (+13) **Dex** 18 (+11) **Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 18 (+11) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 17 (+10)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Netherese
Equipment leather armor, light shield, short sword

THE SHADOVAR

Shadovar Tactics

A Shadovar shadow captain uses *shadow stride* as often as possible to get into advantageous position, then lays into foes with *disrupting strike*. While that power recharges, it makes *greatsword* or *shortbow* attacks against lightly armored enemies. Remember that the presence of a shadow captain affects light in the immediate area.

A stormcaster opens with *bitter gale*, slowing and weakening foes for its allies' followup attacks. It relies on its *thunderbolt* as it stays out of melee, reserving *blinding gale* to disrupt a spellcaster or ranged combatant.

A Shadovar squadmaster typically opens combat with *shortbow* attacks from the edge of the fray, then wades into the thick of combat to flank with allies for its *squadmaster's advantage* and *squad command*. Any enemy fighting in close quarters is made a *choice target*.

A shadow knight opens a battle with *longbow* attacks if it can, in conjunction with its *force of shadow*. Once it enters melee, it stays in the thick of combat to take advantage of its *watchful eye*, targeting heavily armored foes whenever *force of shadow* is in effect.

Shadovar Shadow Captain **Level 16 Skirmisher**
Medium shadow humanoid, shade **XP 1,400**

HP 154; **Bloodied** 77 **Initiative** +14
AC 30; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28 **Perception** +15
Speed 5 Darkvision
Vulnerable radiant (if the shadow captain takes radiant damage, its *regeneration* doesn't function on its next turn)

Traits

☼ **Benighted Presence** ✦ **Aura** 10
Light-producing effects within the aura whose level is lower than the shadow captain's can create only dim light.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Greatsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +22 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 8 damage.

➶ **Shortbow** (weapon) F **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 10 damage

⸸ **Shadow Strike** (necrotic, weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +22 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 9 damage plus ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

Move Actions

Shadow Stride (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⁘ ⁞⁞
The shadow captain can teleport 20 squares but must end this movement in dim light or darkness.

Triggered Actions

Coalescing Darkness ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger (Immediate Reaction): The shadow captain moves 3 or more squares by any means.
Effect: The shadow captain is cloaked with supernatural darkness, gaining total concealment until the start of its next turn.

Skills Acrobatics +17, Diplomacy +18, Intimidate +18, Stealth +17
Str 23 (+14) **Dex** 18 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+10)
Con 18 (+12) **Int** 12 (+9) **Cha** 21 (+13)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Netherese
Equipment chainmail, light shield, greatsword, shortbow, 20 arrows

Shadovar Stormcaster **Level 16 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human **XP 1,400**

HP 121; **Bloodied** 60 **Initiative** +11
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 27 **Perception** +17
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Storm Staff** (lightning, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 lightning damage.

➶ **Thunderbolt** (lightning, thunder, polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 11 lightning and thunder damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the stormcaster's next turn.

✧ **Bitter Gale** (force) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in blast); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 11 force damage, and the target is slowed and weakened until the end of the stormcaster's next turn.

✧ **Blinding Gale** ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +20 vs. Will
Hit: 2d12 + 8 damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Skills Arcana +20, Insight +17
Str 13 (+9) **Dex** 16 (+11) **Wis** 19 (+12)
Con 19 (+12) **Int** 24 (+15) **Cha** 15 (+10)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Netherese
Equipment quarterstaff

Shadovar Squadmaster **Level 15 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human **XP 1,200**

HP 146; **Bloodied** 73 **Initiative** +14
AC 31; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26 **Perception** +9
Speed 7

Traits

Squadmaster's Advantage
A squadmaster gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls against an enemy it is flanking, and its attacks deal 2d6 extra damage to that creature.

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Shortbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 15/30 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Minor Actions

Choice Target ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Attack: Close burst 5 (one enemy)
Effect: The target provokes an opportunity attack from each enemy that is adjacent to it.

Triggered Actions

Squad Command ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The squadmaster is first bloodied.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 10 (allies in burst)
Effect: The target makes a melee basic attack or shifts 3 squares as a free action.

Skills Acrobatics +17, Athletics +18
Str 22 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 18 (+11) **Int** 14 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+11)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment longsword, shortbow, 20 arrows

Shadovar Shadow Knight **Level 14 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human **XP 1,000**

HP 137; **Bloodied** 68 **Initiative** +13
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 25 **Perception** +11
Speed 5

Standard Actions

Warhammer (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 9 damage, and the target is marked.

Longbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20/40 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage, and the target is marked.

Minor Actions

Force of Shadow (force) ✦ **Recharge** 4 5 6
Until the start of the shadow knight's next turn, it gains concealment and its weapon attacks target Will instead of AC.

Triggered Actions

Forceful Critical ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The shadow knight scores a critical hit.
Effect (Free Action): The shadow knight can slide the target of the attack 1 square.

Watchful Eye ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An adjacent enemy shifts or an adjacent enemy marked by the shadow knight attacks an ally.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The shadow knight makes a basic melee attack against the enemy.

Skills Endurance +15, Intimidate +13, Thievery +16
Str 22 (+13) **Dex** 19 (+11) **Wis** 18 (+11)
Con 17 (+10) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 12 (+8)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Netherese
Equipment chainmail, light shield, warhammer, longbow, 20 arrows

M1: Marketplace Skirmish

Encounter Level 16 (7,200 XP)

Setup

1 Sand King stormlord
1 Sand King mystic
2 Sand King shrouded blades
2 Sand King freeblades

This encounter triggers when one of the Sand King shrouded blades hurriedly tries to hide a scroll fragment on the heroes. Unfortunately, none of these Sand Kings (currently on the run from the Shadovar) have much in the way of Thievery skill. More problematically, the on-the-run and low-on-resources Sand King succumbs to the temptation to help himself to the character's purse or some other valuable.

The shrouded blade intent on hiding the fragment looks for the character likely to have the worst Perception check, which translates in his mind as the best-armored fighter, paladin, or other warrior. Alternatively, pick the adventurer with the most hair-trigger temper as a means of kicking things off.

Read or paraphrase the following to the target of the sleight of hand attempt:

The close bustle of the market crowd just took on a more personal touch—you feel pressure at your waist. Glancing down, you see a hand slipping out from your pack with your purse tight in its grasp. The figure attached to the arm is lean and sun-dark—Netherese by his look. When he glances up and sees your eyes on him, he snarls and darts back. A dagger suddenly appears in his hand as he drops into an attack stance.

As soon as his actions are noted, the unfortunate Sand King panics and attacks the chosen character (or anyone else who raises a hue and cry). The other Sand Kings join the melee starting in the second round. Because of the unpredictability of this confrontation, no setup locations are indicated on the map; arrange the combatants to fit the evolving situation.

In the Thick of It

This fight in the bazaar makes use of the crowd as a distraction and ongoing hazard. Place a total of twenty bystanders across the market in squares around and between the stalls. On initiative count 0, each bystander moves 4 squares away from the nearest combat, trying to get to the edge of the map. The bystanders are blocking terrain, but a character can move through a bystander square with a DC 20 Acrobatics or Athletics check.

In the rising pandemonium, the heroes cannot initially get a clear sense of the locations of the other Sand Kings. A successful Perception check alerts them to the imminent threat.

Perception Check
DC 20: *Most of the folk around you are trying to get clear of the brawl, but as the would-be thief draws down, you feel eyes on you from the thick of the crowd. There is more danger here than meets the eye.*

The other Sand Kings move through the crowd toward the characters, who are free to suspect them as antagonists because of that movement. Do not make the threat obvious until they attack.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light (daylight or lanterns) throughout.

Market Stalls: Any square containing part of a canvas stall is difficult terrain. Squares within a stall are difficult terrain and require a DC 13 Athletics or Acrobatics check to move through. On a failed check, see "Market Mayhem" on the following page.

Buildings: The buildings adjacent to the open market court are a mix of merchant's residences and shops. The Sand Kings don't enter the buildings, but you can add doors, windows, and indoor features as appropriate if the adventurers manage to take the fight inside.

Market Mayhem

Any square containing part of a canvas stall is difficult terrain. Squares within a stall are difficult terrain and require a DC 13 Athletics or Acrobatics check to move through. On a failed check, a character crashes into or knocks over a stall, with disruptive effects.

Use the following table to determine what kind of stall has been disturbed and its effect. Unless otherwise indicated, these effects are zones which last until the start of the triggering character's next turn.

d10	Vendor	Effect
1	Poultry farmer	close burst 1; squares are heavily obscured
2	Sheep herder	close burst 2; squares are difficult terrain
3	Knife sharpener	area of the stall; creatures that enter the zone take 1d4 damage; lasts until end of encounter
4	Baker	area of the stall; creatures that enter or begin their turn in the zone take 1d4 fire damage
5	Beermaker	burst 2; squares are challenging terrain (Acrobatics DC 20 when entering the zone to avoid falling prone)
6	Fishmonger	close burst 1; squares are difficult terrain; Acrobatics DC 20 when entering the zone to avoid falling prone
7	Ropemaker	close burst 1; squares are difficult terrain; lasts until end of encounter
8-10	Stall collapses	area of the stall; squares are blocking terrain; lasts until end of encounter

Use stall incidents to increase the visual drama of the fight as characters push through throngs of startled sheep or try to make ranged attacks from within a cloud of chickens.

Tactics

See page 18 for the Sand King statistics. In addition to the personal tactics described there, the Sand Kings make use of the dwindling crowd for cover. With their training in Acrobatics, the shrouded blades and the freeblades duck through the stalls whenever possible, hoping to gain the upper hand on the characters.

If the adventurers do not succeed on the skill challenge, the separatists fight to the best of their ability. When only two Sand Kings are left or all are bloodied, they try to flee, snarling curses at the characters as they go. If the characters pursue, let the fight play out to the end. Otherwise, the Sand Kings quickly vanish from sight.

The Sand Kings will not willingly allow themselves to be taken prisoner or questioned. For these hardened rebels, death is preferable to capture.

Standing Down

The circumstances of this fight give the characters a chance to persuade the fearful Sand Kings that the characters are not a threat and to parlay instead of fighting. Do not tell the players that this skill challenge is an option unless their own action inspires it. If a character makes an Insight check to assess the would-be thief's intent or decides to talk to the Sand Kings during combat with a Bluff or Diplomacy check, treat that as a primary check to let the heroes know that fighting isn't their only option.

Level: 16 (XP 2,800).

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidation.

Bluff or Diplomacy (DC 20, minor action): The character tries to dissuade the Sand Kings from combat with reason or distraction. If the character has attacked a Sand King in the current or previous round, he or she takes a –2 penalty to this check. In order to succeed at the skill challenge, the party must make at least two successful Bluff or Diplomacy checks.

Insight (DC 20, minor action): The adventurer notes that the Sand Kings are fighting from fear, not anger or mistaken identity. In addition to earning a success in the challenge, a successful Insight check grants a +2 bonus to the next Bluff or Diplomacy check made in the challenge.

Intimidate (DC 20, minor action): The character attempts to cow the Sand Kings into standing down. After an Intimidate check, any Bluff or Diplomacy check made in the same round takes a +2 bonus (as the characters undertake a good-cop/bad-cop routine).

Success: The heroes convince the Sand Kings to stand down and have a chance to gain useful information. See "After the Fight" on page 10.

Failure: The characters' attempts to placate the Sand Kings only make them more suspicious. It's a fight to the finish unless the characters undertake the skill challenge again. However, each repeat of the challenge bestows a –2 penalty to all checks.

T1: Mutashi's Tomb

Encounter Level 16 (7,500 XP minimum)

Setup

5+ members of the enemy faction (E)

The characters and any factional allies enter the belowground tomb either by some combination of the stairs or falling into the area. If any characters fall into the tomb, the enemy faction does not have enough time to react, so there is no surprise round. However, adventurers who fall do start the encounter prone.

If all the characters descend the stairs, then they have a chance to catch the enemy by surprise. Adjust the readaloud text depending on which faction is already here and how the characters enter the area.

When the heroes can see the ruined tomb, read:

This wide tomb chamber was once lavishly decorated, but all is in ruins now. Great arches suspending the ceiling are crumbling dangerously, and the floor is covered with rubble and the rotting remains of fine furnishings. A great sepulcher stands at the center, its stone door pulled down long ago. Alcoves are set with moldy mosaics that once showed scenes of luxury and nobility, but much of this has crumbled away to reveal cracked stone beneath. Scattered around the chamber are a half-dozen figures digging cautiously through the rubble.

Perception Check

DC 20: *The walls here are dangerously unstable and look as if they might collapse under any shock or strain.*

This encounter is built around a phantom hunter trap triggered when an arcane, divine, primal, or psionic power is first used in this area. The trap's totem is a bas-relief image of a great hunting hound set into the fallen door of the sepulcher.

Phantom Hunter **Level 18 Lurker**
Trap XP 2,000

From the crumbling sepulcher comes a sudden howl of wind. Dust and mold swirl in the air to take the form of a great beast that lurches forward to attack.

Trap: A phantom hunter fades in and out of existence. It attacks creatures inside or within 2 squares of the sepulcher.

Perception

- ✦ DC 20: The character notices that the shadows play strangely in the area, as if ghostly figures move within them.
- ✦ DC 25: The character notices a bas-relief totem on the underside of the fallen door.

Additional Skill: Arcana

- ✦ DC 29: After the characters spot the totem, an Arcana check to detect magic determines that it courses with primal power.

Trigger

This trap triggers the first time an arcane, divine, primal, or psionic power is used in this area. Thereafter, when an enemy enters the trap area, the phantom hunter makes the following two attacks on initiative counts 25 and 20. If an enemy is currently adjacent to the fallen door, the phantom hunter attacks that creature instead of attacking a random enemy.

For the purpose of this encounter, all creatures in the tomb are enemies of the phantom hunter.

Attack 1

Standard Action **Melee** 1

Special: This attack recharges on a roll of 6 on a d6. The phantom hunter uses this attack first during an encounter. The trap always uses this attack whenever it recharges instead of attack 2.

Target: One creature

Attack: +23 vs. AC

Hit: 3d8 + 7 damage, and the target is weakened and slowed (save ends both).

Attack 2

Standard Action Melee 1

Target: One creature

Attack: +23 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage.

Countermeasures

- ✦ Succeeding on a complexity 1 skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failures) using either Nature or Arcana on the totem disables the trap. The characters disabling the phantom hunter must be adjacent to the fallen door. Each attempt takes a standard action. If the skill challenge results in failure, the phantom hunter trap's Attack 1 recharges automatically and then is triggered as an immediate reaction.

Tactics

See pages 18-21 for the Shadovar and Sand King statistics. In addition to the personal tactics described there, the members of both factions use the rubble piles and the sepulcher as cover as they open combat with ranged attacks. Once battle is joined, they try to use the rubble to limit the tactical movement of their foes.

Both factions are unaware of the power of the sepulcher and the danger of the crumbling walls. The NPCs are as likely as the adventurers to trigger the trap or to cause a wall collapse.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: 30 feet high.

Illumination: The enemy faction has set torches in the ancient sconces around the chamber, filling the area with bright light.

Sepulcher: This crumbling monument was the resting place of the merchant lord Mutashi, but it was opened and looted decades ago. The interior of the sepulcher is difficult terrain. The 15-foot-high sepulcher can be climbed with a DC 20 Athletics check.

Fallen Stone Door: The huge stone door to the sepulcher lies on the floor. The area where the door has fallen is difficult terrain. The doorway is also the portal hidden in this area. (When it was functional, one stepped through the portal as if entering or leaving the sepulcher.)

Totem: A bas-relief image of a great hunting hound is set into the front of the fallen door of the sepulcher. This serves as the totem for the phantom hunter trap. It takes a DC 25 Perception check to notice the totem hidden on the underside of the door (it is noticed automatically if someone lifts or flips over the door).

Crumbling Walls: The walls of the tomb (excluding the stairs) are dangerously unstable and can collapse at any time. Any power that deals damage to all creatures in a blast or burst whose area includes a wall causes 1 square of the wall in that area to collapse in a close burst 1. Any creature in the burst takes 1d10 damage from falling rubble and is knocked prone. The area of the burst is difficult terrain thereafter.

Rubble: These squares are difficult terrain.

T2: Temple of Mystra

Encounter Level 16 (7,800 XP minimum)

Setup

1 banderhobb abductor (A)
1 banderhobb filch (F)
3 banderhobb warders (W)

The adventurers' entrance into this area should follow seamlessly from their passage through the previous chambers. The players should have no warning that an encounter is imminent.

When the characters can see up the stairs, read:

A ruined great hall stands shrouded in the same, swirling darkness as the rest of the temple. A great stone altar consecrated to Mystra has been shattered and cast down to a pile of rubble. The seven stars of the goddess's sign are charred and melted like slag on what is left of the altar's capstone. Beyond, the telltale sigils of a portal adorn the stones of a crumbling archway set into a blank expanse of wall.

Perception Check
DC 25: *The swirling shadow in the great hall seems as harmless as in any of the chambers you passed through, but there is movement of a different sort here. Dark creatures lurk within the shadows, waiting for your approach.*

If they are not spotted, the abductor and the filch wait until suitable targets are within 5 squares, then use surprise to attack with *grasping tongue* and *stinking gob*. The warders with their lack of stealth take full cover behind the altar so they cannot be seen. They attack only in the second full round of combat.

Enemies and Allies

If the characters have chosen one faction to ally with, they arrive at the encounter with that faction, which grants them an edge in the initial combat against the banderhobbs. That edge is diminished when the enemy faction shows up in round 4 of the fight; they watched from a distance as the heroes entered the temple, then followed them in. The number of NPCs in each faction should equal the number of characters. See pages 18-21 for Sand King and Shadovar statistics.

If the adventurers are feigning allegiance to one faction or the other, use the same setup as above. When the 'enemy' faction shows up, they will aid the characters in the fight, focusing on the party's supposed allies while the characters finish off the banderhobbs.

If the heroes have not allied with either faction, then they fight the banderhobbs alone. Three Shadovar show up in the immediate aftermath of combat and try to reclaim any scroll fragments the weakened characters carry. If this second fight goes on for more than 5 rounds, have three Sand Kings appear to attack both the Shadovar and the characters. At that point, the adventurers can choose sides however they wish.

Banderhobb Abductor (A) Large shadow magical beast		**Level 18 Brute** XP 2,000
HP 211; **Bloodied** 105		**Initiative** +17
AC 30, **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30		**Perception** +16
Speed 6, swim 6		Darkvision
Standard Actions		
Bite ✦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. AC		
Hit: 3d12 + 13 damage.		
Grasping Tongue ✦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d12 + 3 damage, and the abductor pulls the target 4 squares to a space adjacent to the abductor and grabs the creature.		
Gobble ✦ At-Will		
Requirement: The abductor must be bloodied.		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. AC		
Hit: 4d12 + 7 damage, and the abductor grabs the target. If the target is bloodied, the abductor recharges *swallow* and uses it against the target.		
Swallow ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⚅		
Attack: Melee 1 (one bloodied creature grabbed by the abductor); +21 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: The target is removed from play. Until the effect ends, the target takes ongoing 10 damage. The target can take actions as normal and can make melee and close attacks against the abductor. The effect ends when the abductor drops to 0 hit points or when the abductor ends the effect as a free action. When the effect ends, the target appears in an unoccupied space of its choice adjacent to the abductor.		
Triggered Actions		
Cross into Shadow (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**		
Trigger: The abductor is first bloodied.		
Effect (No Action): The abductor is removed from play until the start of its next turn. The abductor then appears in an unoccupied space within 10 squares of its last location.		
Skills Athletics +20, Stealth +22		
Str 22 (+15)	**Dex** 27 (+17)	**Wis** 25 (+16)
Con 21 (+14)	**Int** 22 (+15)	**Cha** 12 (+10)
Alignment evil	**Languages** understands Goblin	

Banderhobb Filch (F)	Level 17 Skirmisher (Leader)
Small shadow magical beast	XP 1,600
HP 164; **Bloodied** 82	**Initiative** +18
AC 31, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 27	**Perception** +14
Speed 6, climb 3, swim 6	Darkvision

Standard Actions

Quick Claw ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 3d6 + 15 damage, and the filch shifts 1 square.

Stinking Gob ✦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 2d12 + 4 damage.

Effect: The filch shifts 1 square.

Hook Strike ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. Reflex

Hit: 3d6 + 4 damage, and the filch grabs the target.

Shadow Blink (teleportation) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⚅

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 4d8 + 20 damage.

Effect: The filch teleports 5 squares before or after the attack.

Distracting Frenzy ✦ Encounter

Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in burst); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage.

Effect: An ally within 5 squares of the filch immediately takes a standard action as a free action.

Move Actions

Drag Away ✦ At-Will

Requirement: The filch must have a creature grabbed.

Effect: The filch moves its speed, pulling the grabbed creature with it. The filch and the creature grabbed by it do not provoke opportunity attacks from each other for this movement.

Skills Athletics +20, Stealth +21

Str 24 (+15)	**Dex** 27 (+16)	**Wis** 23 (+14)
Con 20 (+13)	**Int** 21 (+13)	**Cha** 10 (+8)

Alignment evil **Languages** understands Goblin

3 Banderhobb Warders (W)	Level 16 Soldier
Large shadow magical beast	XP 1,400 each
HP 160; **Bloodied** 80	**Initiative** +16
AC 32, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26	**Perception** +15
Speed 6, swim 6	Darkvision

Standard Actions

Longfinger Claw ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +21 vs. AC

Hit: 3d8 + 11 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the warder's next turn.

Lightning Tongue (lightning) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d8 + 7 lightning damage, and the target falls prone.

Longfinger Clutch ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +21 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the warder's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Swallow ✦ At-Will

Trigger: A Large or smaller enemy marked by the warder makes an attack that does not include the warder as a target.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The warder shifts 3 squares to a space adjacent to the triggering enemy and makes the following attack.

Attack: Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +19 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target is removed from play. Until the effect ends, the target takes ongoing 10 damage. The target can take actions as normal and can make melee and close attacks against the warder. The effect ends when the warder drops to 0 hit points or when the warder ends the effect as a free action. When the effect ends, the target appears in an unoccupied space of its choice adjacent to the warder.

No Escape (teleportation) **✦ Encounter**

Trigger: An enemy marked by the warder ends its move.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The warder teleports 10 squares to a space adjacent to the triggering enemy.

Skills Athletics +21

Str 26 (+16)	**Dex** 23 (+14)	**Wis** 24 (+15)
Con 24 (+15)	**Int** 22 (+14)	**Cha** 11 (+8)

Alignment evil **Languages** understands Goblin

Tactics

The abductor targets lightly armored characters with *gobble* or *grasping tongue*, grabbing to set up a *swallow* attack the following round. The abductor swallows as many characters as it can, but it ends the effect on any victim that deals damage to it for two consecutive rounds.

The filch uses *distracting frenzy* as early as possible, granting an extra action to one of the warders. It uses *hook strike* and *drag away* against a striker or defender, keeping that foe out of the fight and giving the warders free run of the chamber. If pressed, it uses *quick claw* or *stinking gob* to shift, then moves out of danger.

The warders flank for combat advantage or focus attacks on heroes previously knocked prone with *lightning tongue*. A warder uses *longfinger clutch* to mark a wizard, ranger, or other ranged attacker, then stays close to that foe hoping for *swallow* to trigger. A warder swallows as many characters as it can, but it ends the effect on any victim that deals damage to it for two consecutive rounds.

All the banderhobbs are aware of the malfunctioning portal, and they avoid its area if they can.

The NPC factions use the altar as cover when they can. Regardless of circumstance or overall allegiance, both the Shadovar and the Sand Kings are happy to let the adventurers take on the banderhobbs while they focus their wrath on each other. Once the power of the faulty arch has been revealed, the NPCs try to avoid its area.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: 40 feet high.

Illumination: None; magical light sources cast dim illumination if the characters brought any with them.

Roiling Darkness: The unnatural shadow negates any mundane light source and reduces magical light sources to dim light in this area.

Stairs: This crumbling staircase is difficult terrain.

Ruined Altar: The stones of this collapsed and ruined altar form a pile of rubble 5 feet high. The pile provides cover. It takes a DC 20 Athletics check to scramble onto the altar, which is difficult terrain.

Rubble: Areas of loose rubble are difficult terrain.

Faulty Portal Arch: This portal is not currently functioning, but the teleportation magic that still imbues its stones makes the area around the archway hazardous. Any creature that ends its turn within the area marked on the map must make a DC 20 Arcana check. On a successful check, the creature can teleport 10 squares as a free action as the first action of its next turn. On a failed check, the creature is teleported 1d6 squares in a random direction. A creature that is teleported into another creature, the ruined altar, or a wall takes 1d10+7 damage and then is placed in an unoccupied space nearest to its destination.

S1: Shadow Chasm

Encounter Level 17 (8,400 XP minimum)

Setup

1 shadar-kai blacksoul (B)
3 shadar-kai dawnkillers (D)
1 shadar-kai painbearer (P)

The entrance to the Spiral Gate is guarded by a force of shadar-kai tasked with preparing the portal for activation. Their preliminary rituals are now complete; all that remains is the final ritual undertaken with the scroll fragments.

When the adventurers can see into the cavern from the ledge, read:

A wide cavern opens up on two levels below. Its rough stone floor is set with crumbling columns. A narrow ledge leads down 20 feet to the first tier. It offers no cover, however, from the five shadar-kai that pace fretfully across the middle of the cavern.

The setup of these final two encounters depend on the circumstances that brought the characters here.

If the characters have avoided allegiances and enter this area alone, this encounter becomes a straight-up fight against the shadar-kai defenders. Any Sand Kings or Shadovar in pursuit hold back and wait for the opportunity to push through to the Spiral Gate.

If the characters are allied with the Sand Kings, then both factions attack the shadar-kai together. Any surviving Shadovar join the fray if they have the ability to follow from either of the previous encounters. At least some of the Shadovar hold back in case the heroes make it through to the Spiral Gate below.

If the characters are allied with the Shadovar, then they enter this area freely on the overt assumption that the adventure is at an end. If one of the party members correctly assessed Durbela during his initial overtures to them, they are likely expecting a sudden but inevitable betrayal now that the Shadovar have gotten all they need and have the characters outnumbered.

As soon as the shadar-kai are sighted, whoever is in charge of the Shadovar calls out to them. (This betrayal works best if the somewhat sadistic Nulu has taken command of the Shadovar after Durbela is slain; see "Chain of Command," page 9.) **Read the following aloud:**

Without so much as a glance back at you, the Shadovar shouts out to the shadar-kai guards ahead. "With thanks to our friends here, the scroll fragments are ours. Show them the gratitude of Netheril. Kill them all."

The Easy Way In

If the characters are not entering this area as soon-to-be-former allies of the Shadovar, they can choose to fight their way in starting from the high ledge. Characters who have learned any of the details of the Shadovar's plots can also easily pretend to be on Durbela's side to gain the shadar-kai's initial trust.

The shadar-kai immediately present weapons and go into defensive positions behind the pillars at the first sign of the heroes. They are under orders to grant no one except Durbela or Nulu access to the portal chasm, so a fight is inevitable. However, a DC 31 Diplomacy check or DC 25 Bluff check will cause enough uncertainty among the shadar-kai for the characters to clamber down to the first tier of the chamber. If the characters then attack immediately instead of trying to parley further, they gain a surprise round and the shadar-kai take a –2 penalty to all defenses until the beginning of the third full round of combat.

Shadar-Kai Blacksoul	**Level 14 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid	XP 1,000
HP 138; **Bloodied** 69	**Initiative** +10
AC 26; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28	**Perception** +8
Speed 7	low-light vision
Traits	
Shrouded in Gloom	
While shrouded in gloom, a creature takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and gains only half the benefit of healing effects.	
Standard Actions	
Corrupting Blackfire (fire, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 fire and necrotic damage, and the target is shrouded in gloom (save ends).	
Shadowbolt (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +18 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d6 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is shrouded in gloom (save ends).	
Corrupt Soul (charm) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature shrouded in gloom); +18 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends).	
Shadowburst (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅	
Attack: Area burst 3 within 10 (enemies in burst); +16 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is shrouded in gloom (save ends).	
Miss: Half damage.	
Move Actions	
Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**	
The shadar-kai blacksoul teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.	
Skills Arcana +19, Stealth +15	
Str 12 (+8)	**Dex** 16 (+10) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 18 (+11)	**Int** 24 (+14) **Cha** 20 (+12)
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor	

3 Shadar-Kai Dawnkillers **Level 14 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 1,000 each

HP 106; **Bloodied** 53 **Initiative** +18
AC 28; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 25 **Perception** +16
Speed 7 low-light vision

Traits

Shrouded in Gloom
While shrouded in gloom, a creature takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and gains only half the benefit of healing effects.

Shadows of the Raven Queen (necrotic)
The shadar-kai dawnkiller's melee attacks deal 2d6 extra necrotic damage against a target that cannot see the dawnkiller.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Kukri** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target is shrouded in gloom (save ends).

⸸ **Shade Strike** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature shrouded in gloom); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Move Actions

Shadow Jaunt (teleportaion) ✦ **Encounter**
The shadar-kai dawnkiller teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.

Skills Acrobatics +19, Stealth +19
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 18 (+11)
Con 16 (+10) **Int** 14 (+9) **Cha** 11 (+7)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, 2 kukris

Shadar-Kai Painbearer **Level 15 Skirmisher (Leader)**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 1,200

HP 144; **Bloodied** 72 **Initiative** +16
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 27 **Perception** +11
Speed 7 low-light vision

Traits

☼ **Shadow Weft** ✦ **Aura 5**
Each shadar-kai ally within the aura shifts 1 square as a free action after it hits with a melee attack.

Shrouded in Gloom
While shrouded in gloom, a creature takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and gains only half the benefit of healing effects.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Shadow Chain** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is shrouded in gloom save ends).

⸸ **Shadow Dance** (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
The shadar-kai painbearer shifts 7 squares and makes three shadow chain attacks during the move, each against a different target. The painbearer's second and third attacks deal 2d6 extra necrotic damage for each prior attack that has hit. A creature that is shrouded in gloom and is hit by an attack is blinded (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Shadow Boon ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An ally within 10 squares of the shadar-kai painbearer misses with an attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The triggering ally rerolls the attack roll.

Move Actions

Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
The shadar-kai painbearer teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn.

Skills Acrobatics +19, Stealth +19
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 24 (+14) **Wis** 18 (+11)
Con 16 (+10) **Int** 14 (+9) **Cha** 11 (+7)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, spiked chain

Pillars of Shadow **Level 17 Elite Blaster**
Trap XP 3,200

Crumbling pillars across the chamber are shrouded by black mist.

Trap: When a creature uses any magic in this chamber, the nearest pillars lash out with deadly tendrils of shadow.

Perception
✦ DC 20: A character spots the shadow clinging to the pillars.

Additional Skill: Arcana or Religion
✦ DC 20: Necrotic power imbued within the pillars is sensitive to magic.
✦ DC 25: Radiant damage will temporarily thwart the power of the pillars.

Trigger
The trap attacks whenever a creature in the chamber uses an arcane, divine, primal, or psionic power, or makes an attack that uses the enhancement bonus of a magic weapon or a magic implement, or uses a magic item power. The triggering creature is targeted by all pillars within range.

Attack ✦ Necrotic
Free Action **Ranged** 3
Attack: +18 vs. Reflex
Target: The triggering creature.
Hit: Ongoing 10 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Countermeasures
✦ With a DC 13 Arcana or Religion check (minor action), a character gains a +2 bonus to Reflex against the trap's next attack.
✦ A pillar targeted by a power that deals radiant damage is disabled until the end of the encounter. Before being disabled, the pillar makes an attack against the character targeting it.

Tactics

The shadar-kai blacksoul falls back to strike with *shadowburst*, using *shadowbolt* and *corrupt soul* while that power recharges. A dominated adventurer defends the blacksoul against any other characters pressing it. The blacksoul reserves its *shadow jaunt* until it is surrounded. For the purpose of activating the shadow pillars, the blacksoul's powers are considered arcane powers. As such, it avoids active pillars.

The dawnkillers use *shadow jaunt* to get into position against lightly armored characters, then make repeated *shade strike* attacks. Once a first hero is blinded, all three dawnkillers focus on that target, trusting their *shadows of the Raven Queen* power for a quick kill.

The painbearer stays in motion across the battlefield with *shadow dance*, making *shadow chain* attacks against lightly armored or blinded foes while that power recharges.

Development

The characters and any factional allies are free to bolt for the portal chasm (see below), but any surviving shadar-kai or Shadovar pursue. Those creatures know the tunnel and the spiral ledge below, and they have no interest in fighting in such close quarters. Rather, they descend a safe distance behind the characters (who can attempt a DC 20 Perception check to hear them following). Add these creatures to the enemy faction that attacks in tactical encounter S2.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: 20 feet high over the landing; 30 feet high over the dead portal.

Illumination: Smoky lanterns set around the cavern shed dim light throughout the area.

Rubble: Areas of loose rubble are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or is forced to move through rubble must make a DC 13 Acrobatics check or fall prone at the end of that movement.

Pillars: Crumbling, black stone pillars rise to within a few feet of the ceiling. Most of the pillars on the first tier are inert; most of the pillars around the dead portal are imbued with deadly necrotic energy (see the Pillars of Shadow statistics block on page 30).

Central Ledge: A 10-foot drop separates the two sides of this chamber. The central ledge can be climbed with a DC 13 Athletics check.

S2: The Spiral Gate

Encounter Level 19 (12,800 XP minimum)

Setup

2 thaaluds (T)

The Spiral Gate

Even as the fight unfolds, the factions here attempt to control the Spiral Gate. This powerful portal is keyed to ancient magic imbued in the scroll fragments, by which its dormant power can be reactivated or permanently disabled.

Depending on how the characters are allied with either the Sand Kings or the Shadovar, they might undertake the skill challenge on their own or in conjunction with another group.

Among the Sand Kings and the Shadovar, the skill challenge will be attempted by characters with training in Arcana or Thievery (a mystic or stormlord; a stormcaster or shadow knight) or by characters who attack the portal arch.

Special: The DCs given below assume that all four scroll fragments are present in the cavern, as they should be if the characters and their allies obtained all four or once the enemy faction arrives. For each scroll fragment missing, all checks in the challenge take a –2 penalty. At least two fragments must be present for the skill challenge to be attempted at all.

A character attempting to destroy (not reactivate!) the portal can attack the archway with a magic weapon, an arcane power, or a divine power. The archway has AC, Reflex, and Fortitude 31. A single attack that deals 15 or more damage to the archway earns 1 success in the skill challenge. Attacks which miss or deal less than 15 damage have no effect; they don't count as skill failures. (For the purpose of the skill challenge, treat the attacks of any of the NPCs as magic weapon or arcane attacks).

Level: 17 (XP 1,600).

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

The effective complexity of this skill challenge is increased by the presence of another faction attempting to counter the adventurers' efforts to activate or disable the Spiral Gate. Each success earned in this skill challenge adds to the earning side's tally of successes and also reduces the opposing side's tally by one. This cannot reduce the number of successes for any faction to less than 0.

Primary Skills: Arcana, Thievery.

Arcana (DC 25, standard action): By tapping into the flow of arcane power within the archway, a character can tune or disrupt that power.

Thievery (DC 25, standard action): The spirals graven into the archway control the flow of magical energy within it. By careful manipulation, a character can interrupt or focus that power. This check must be made by a character adjacent to the archway. Members of a faction cannot earn a success in the challenge with Thievery until they have earned 1 success with Arcana.

Secondary Skills: Insight, Perception.

Insight or Perception (DC 14, minor action): The magic within the portal ebbs and flows with a pattern that can be discerned. With a successful check, the hero gains a +2 bonus on his or her next primary check made in the challenge.

Success: The first faction to attain 4 successes before 3 failures in the challenge succeeds in its goal of activating or permanently disabling the Spiral Gate. With overall success in the skill challenge, the scroll fragments are destroyed.

Failure: The various characters' attempts to control the power of the Spiral Gate lead to a dangerous pulse of arcane energy. All creatures in the area except the thaaluds lose one healing surge. (NPCs without healing surges take damage equal to half their bloodied value.) All factions lose accrued successes or failures and must begin again if they continue with the skill challenge. All subsequent skill checks in the challenge (but not attacks against the portal) have a –2 penalty; this is cumulative each time the skill challenge fails.

Special: In the event that the characters and their allies win the combat before anyone succeeds at the skill challenge, they can then finish reactivating or destroying the portal safely and automatically in a few minutes without risking more skill checks.

Tactics

The thaaluds attack all creatures except the shadar-kai that control them (including any Shadovar here). Each strikes with *double attack* or *sweeping maul* each round, falling back on *thrown maul* only if no creatures are within reach.

See pages 18-21 for the Shadovar and Sand King statistics blocks. In addition to the personal tactics described there, the members of both factions use the rubble piles as cover.

2 Thaaluds (T)	Level 20 Elite Soldier
Huge natural animate (construct)	XP 5,600 each
HP 380; **Bloodied** 190	**Initiative** +15
AC 38; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 32	**Perception** +16
Speed 8 (earth walk), burrow 2 (tunneling)blind, blindsight 20	
Immune poison; **Resist** 10 cold, 10 fire, 10 lightning	
Saving Throws +2	
Action Point 1	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Maul** (weapon) F **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +27 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage.	
⊛ **Thrown Maul** (weapon) F **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +26 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage. The maul returns to the thaalud's grasp at the end of its turn.	
⸸ **Double Attack** (weapon) F **At-Will**	
The thaalud makes two melee basic attacks.	
⸸ **Sweeping Maul** (weapon) F **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage, the target is pushed 2 squares and is knocked prone, and the thaalud can make a melee basic attack against another creature within reach.	
✲ **Spike Stones** (zone) F **Encounter**	
Attack: Area burst 3 within 20 (enemies in burst); +24 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). The area of the burst becomes a zone which is difficult terrain until the end of the encounter.	
Critical Hit: As above, but the target takes a -5 penalty to its saving throw to end the slowed condition.	
Skills Arcana +21	
Str 30 (+20) **Dex** 17 (+13) **Wis** 12 (+11)	
Con 22 (+16) **Int** 22 (+16) **Cha** 24 (+17)	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** understands Common and Netherese; telepathy 20
Equipment *+1 adamantine magic maul*	

Features of the Area

Ceiling: Sloping 20 feet above the spiral ledge; 30 feet high at the bottom of the chamber.

Illumination: The portal sheds dim light within 2 squares. The rest of the area, including the initial descent passageway and the spiral ledge, is dark.

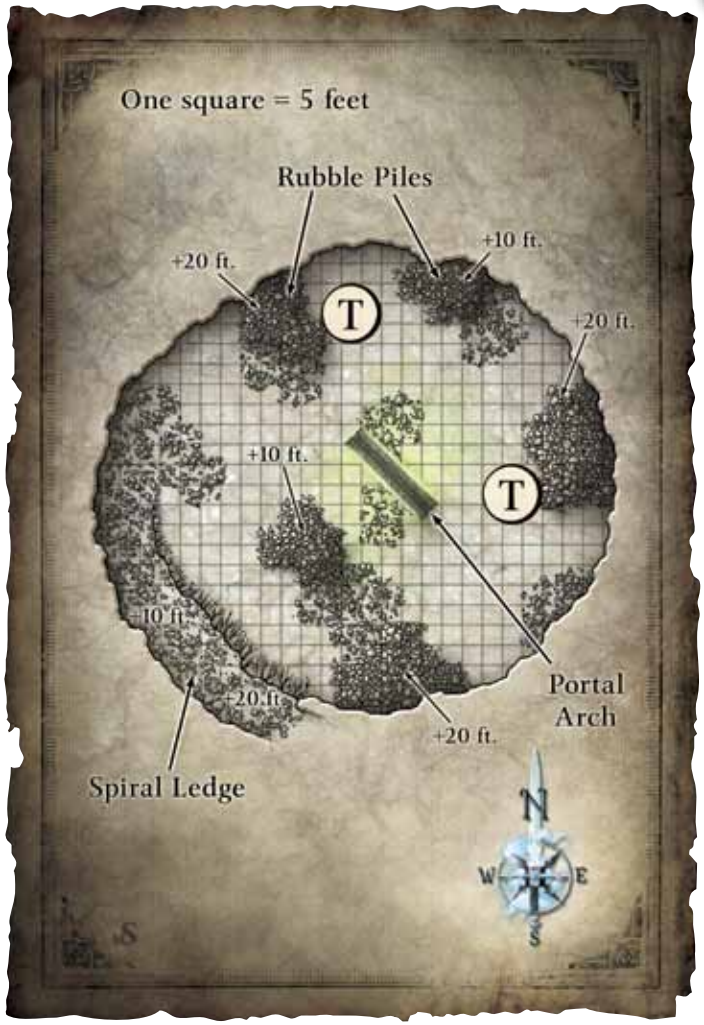
Spiral Ledge: The stone ledge that spirals down toward the bottom of this cavern is recessed into the rock wall and strewn with rubble, making for a precarious descent. The ramp itself is difficult terrain. A creature can move at half speed along a ledge without risk. Moving at more than half speed (in or out of combat) requires a DC 14 Athletics check. On a failed check, roll 1d6: on 1-4, the creature slides 1 square down the ramp and falls prone; on 5-6, the creature slides off the edge. A creature that slides off the edge gets a saving throw to catch itself.

If the adventurers enter combat while descending the spiral ledge, expand the tactical map to include the ledge making two full arcs around the cavern. The ledge rises 30 feet for every quarter-arc, or 120 feet for every full circuit of the cavern. Because the ledge is recessed, creatures on it have cover against attacks from creatures that are not on the ledge.

Portal Arch: This rough stone archway stands 20 feet high by 20 feet wide. Its stones are carved in spiral patterns that glow faintly. See "The Spiral Gate" skill challenge on page 32.

Rubble Piles: Piles of rocks and rubble rise to the indicated heights. Climbing a rubble pile takes a DC 20 Athletics check.

Rubble: Areas of loose stone are difficult terrain. A character who runs, charges, or is forced to move through rubble must make a DC 13 Acrobatics check or fall prone at the end of that movement.



CHAOS SCAR™

THE PILLAR OF EYES

An adventure for 4th-level characters

By Robert J. Schwalb

illustration by Empty Room Studios, Jeffrey Lai ✦ cartography by Mike Schley

TM & © 2010 Wizards of the Coast LLC All rights reserved.

"Oh, there are many strange things beyond the Wall. I have seen some for myself. I've witnessed the wonders it contains, and the horrors besides. Yet for every obvious danger and splendid treasure, there are things that have held their secrets close, places where some mysteries remain guarded despite my best efforts and those of other less worthy souls.

"One such place is the Pillar of Eyes. A fascinating structure, and undoubtedly straddling a ley line—you can see the gaps through the trees just there. But, you might ask, what does it do? Who raised it? And why? What do the eyes watch for? Do they even see? Trust me, traveler, these questions and others born from my fabulous intellect have troubled me greatly these long weeks. I defy you to answer even one of them!"

—Jinko Storwell, renowned sage

Not far from the wall bounding the Chaos Scar's haunted lands is a crooked stone pillar, standing alone in an otherwise ordinary field. It resembles nothing so much as a stack of staring eyeballs. Many explorers have sought out the strange monolith, certain some power hums beneath its rocky façade. But if the relic does hold magic, gaining access to it has proven troublesome. No one thus far has winkled out enough energy to power even the simplest cantrip.

Thus the Pillar of Eyes has remained a hoary and puzzling edifice, a source of speculation and wonder for those who would test their mettle against the Chaos Scar's manifold dangers. Recent study of the stone suggests that whatever it contains might be growing restive. Perhaps someone with special talents might be able to touch its magic and claim it.

"The Pillar of Eyes" is a Chaos Scar adventure for five characters of 4th level.

An Unsightly Stone

The trouble with the Pillar of Eyes is that, for as long as it has stood (and local graybeards swear it has been there for as long as they can remember), it hasn't done a thing. Not even spooky moaning or phantasms have arisen to indicate that anything is special about it.

It is certainly a curious piece, an oddity in construction and style suggesting that some inhuman architect might have been responsible for the awful thing. Who else would find beauty in such a grotesque form? Adventurers have suggested it might be a petrified creature, but if this theory is correct, it only raises more questions. What was it before? Why did it turn to stone? No one has yet tested this idea by performing a Remove Affliction ritual—doing so might let loose some hideous eyeball monster on the countryside. Thus, most experts prefer to focus on the more fantastic and wondrous stories attributed to the stone.

A second, more romantic, theory suggests the pillar was raised to honor the Master of Whispers: old Silence himself, the god Vecna. As anyone with passing knowledge is aware, the Lich Lord has an enduring interest in eyes, due in part to his losing one valuable orb. His cultists often honor their dread master by offering eyes—and hands—to their dark master, whether in flesh or stone. This possibility has drawn the unhealthy interest of a gluttonous barghest, Foosteth the Fat, the most recent in a long line of unhinged and thoroughly wicked villains to obsess over the Pillar's mysterious powers.

Facts about the Pillar

The pillar is in fact a petrified gibbering mouther that was created from a priest of Vecna who perished in a place touched by the Far Realm. Unlike others of its kind, the aberrant monster retained much of its awareness and knowledge. It slithered into the valley, where it ran afoul of something that turned it to stone. Because of its unique experience, the pillar is important to Vecna's followers. As well, many cultists with a passion for the forbidden would love to free the imprisoned mouther.

Foosteth the Fat

Aside from a predisposition to huskiness, Foosteth would have been an unremarkable barghest—a vile, ravenous monster to be sure, but no different than any others of his kind. His life took an unexpected turn when he gobbled up a priest devoted to Vecna. The priest had come to the Chaos Scar to unlock the power of the Pillar of Eyes, but Foosteth caught him before he had the chance to begin the ritual of Remove Affliction that would release the petrified monster. Not only did the bones yield rich marrow, but the priest's will persisted beyond the life feeding. His memories and consciousness took root in Foosteth's mind, filling it with strange thoughts and an obsession with undead—and the mysterious pillar.

During the weeks that followed, Foosteth acquired some of the dead man's talents from the devoured memories. He itches to perform the Remove Affliction ritual, but he is not yet powerful enough to control it and lacks the necessary ingredients. Having no treasures worth disenchanting, Foosteth has turned to simple banditry to gather up magic items and distill them down to *residuum*. In time, he is certain he will accrue the necessary knowledge and experience to meet the ritual's demands.

One obstacle blocks the barghest from his dearest desire: his innate lethargy. Foosteth is unwilling to shift his bulk from his noisome throne room, so he relies on underlings to do the robbing for him. Having heard their fat leader go on about the pillar's fabulous power, a few unscrupulous goblins have got the idea to claim it for themselves and destroy him so they can receive a proper share of the food for once. They are too weak to overpower him but are constantly looking out for opportunities. Foosteth is too absorbed in his own conflicting thoughts to pay them any mind. He waits, patience fraying, for them to bring back the goods so he can get on with the ritual and be done with the accursed stone that torments him.

Involving the Characters

The Pillar of Eyes is a well-known point of interest in the Chaos Scar. The adventurers might come across the monolith while taking in the valley's sights on their way to slay monsters. Gawking at the stone like tourists is not very heroic, though, so you might prefer to draw in your players with the following hooks.

If you're using one of these hooks, the party receives treasure on completing the quest. Otherwise, you can add the appropriate treasure to the loot gained in the final encounter.

Font of Dread Power: The characters hear rumors that the Pillar of Eyes is pregnant with sinister power and that its destruction might reduce the Chaos Scar's malign presence. Alternatively, they are hired to investigate the pillar and destroy it. Their employer might be a sage, wizard, or priest, with a personality ranging from eccentric to pompous. Regardless, the employer rewards adventurers who complete this desperate mission.

Quest Reward: 875 XP (major quest). The adventurers also receive 140 gp and two *potions of healing*.

A Plague of Dreams: The petrified gibbering mouther wants desperately to be free. Unlike most creatures turned to stone, it retains some awareness and broadcasts its thoughts across the land, luring the adventurers to release it. The telepathic summons interferes with sleep, preventing extended rests as long as the adventurers remain in the Valley of the Scar. Whether the monster is harmless or a serious danger, the party needs to come to the pillar and decide what to do. The Remove Affliction ritual is beyond their ability to perform, even if they were inclined to use it after seeing the pillar. Destroying the statue, freeing the gibbering mouther, or getting someone else to free it completes the quest.

Quest Reward: 175 XP (minor quest). If the party frees the monster, it is grateful and offers a reward by describing a hidden treasure cache. Following up the description might be the seed for another adventure. Success leads to a 5th-level magic item and 250 gp.

Getting Started

The Pillar of Eyes is within sight of the wall enclosing the valley of the Chaos Scar, so once the characters cross, they can head straight there. How long this takes depends on where they entered the Scar.

When the adventurers can see the Pillar of Eyes, read:

A monstrous pillar, crooked and spotted with lichen, rises from a crude pedestal in the middle of a green field. Bones litter the ground all around it, suggesting it might be an altar of some kind. The pillar has a lumpy appearance. Closer inspection reveals the reason: It is a giant column of stone eyes.

Investigating the Pillar

The most notable feature here is the pillar, though the bones might merit some investigation too. The monolith guards its secrets well, and only dedicated study can coax them forth. However, while the adventurers examine the site, goblin wolf riders slowly converge on their position. Should the characters become confused or distracted by their investigation (represented by failing the skill challenge), the goblins can get the drop on them.

Level: 4 (XP 350)

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, Heal, Religion, Perception

Arcana (DC 14, 1 minute): The character attempts to sense the presence of magic. A successful check contributes 1 success toward the skill challenge and reveals an arcane aura about the pillar. With a second success, the character confirms that the pillar is a petrified creature. Arcana can be used to gain 2 successes in this challenge.

Dungeoneering (DC 14, 1 minute): The character tries to identify the creature depicted by the column. A successful check reveals it to be a gibbering mouther, a kind of aberrant magical beast created when a sentient creature dies in an area touched by the Far Realm. Beating the DC by 5 or more allows the character to learn about the creature's powers. (For more information about gibbering beasts, see *Monster Manual*, page 127.) Dungeoneering can be used to gain 1 success in this challenge.

Heal (DC 14, 1 minute): A character near the bones can determine that they all belonged to humanoids. With a second success, the character realizes that the creatures were killed somewhere else; as well, the bones look like something had been chewing on them. Heal can be used to gain 2 successes in this challenge.

Perception (DC 14, 1 minute): The character searches the area. A successful check reveals bestial prints in the soft earth all around the pillar. With a second success, the character learns the direction from which the creatures approached. Perception can be used to gain 2 successes in this challenge.

Religion (DC 21, 1 minute): The character locates and deciphers hidden runes on the pillar's base. These runes signify some connection to Vecna. Religion can be used to gain 1 success in this challenge.

Secondary Skill: Nature

Nature (DC 10, requires 1 success using Perception, 1 minute): The character tries to identify the prints around the pillar. A successful check reveals that the prints belong to dire wolves and grants a +2 bonus to the next Perception check made during this challenge.

Success: If the characters get 6 successes, they learn that the pillar is in fact a petrified creature and that someone or something is delivering bones to the area, which has seen a great deal of traffic. They also detect the goblin wolf riders before they close and thus are not surprised.

Failure: The wolf riders surprise the party. After the combat, the characters can retry the skill challenge to pick up any clues they might have missed. Let them keep any successes earned from the first try (a failed effort doesn't mean they forgot what they had previously learned). The Nature check automatically succeeds, whether or not anyone attempted it. However, each time the party fails the challenge after the first costs each character a healing surge as the pillar's malevolent influence gnaws at the soul.

Should the party not bother to retry the skill challenge, you can make up for the lost XP by adding one extra cunning goblin archer to Tactical Encounter 2 and an extra green slime to Tactical Encounter 3.

Wolf Riders

Whether or not they succeed at the skill challenge, the adventurers must deal with the wolf riders, goblins charged by Foosteth to plunder explorers that wander into the area.

Tactical Encounter 1: "Howling Host," page 10.

Tracking the Wolf Riders

After the characters defeat the wolf riders, they should be able to figure out that the goblins are somehow involved with the pillar. The goblins are carrying bones similar to those surrounding the edifice, which the party can confirm by searching bodies or interrogating prisoners.

The adventurers can follow the wolf riders' tracks to discover their lair, represented by the following staged skill challenge. If they capture a goblin during the combat, they might be able to persuade it to help them (see "Development" on page 10).

Level: 5 (XP 200)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Stage 1: Finding the Way

The first stage of the challenge involves detecting and following the wolf riders' tracks. This process should take around half an hour.

Primary Skills: Nature, Perception

Nature or Perception (DC 14): The character attempts to follow the goblins' tracks. Up to two characters can aid this check. A successful check allows the party to continue along the trail, while a failed check means it fades out where the goblins crossed rocky terrain. The characters lose the trail for a time and get lost; they must find the tracks again to continue the chase. In addition to incurring a failure, the characters take a –2 penalty to Acrobatics or Athletics checks made during stage 2 of this challenge. On a second failure, they also take a –2 penalty to Stealth checks made during stage 3 of this challenge. This skill can be used to gain 2 successes in this challenge.

Secondary Skill: Insight

Insight (DC 21): The character examines the manner of the goblins' approach to deduce the direction they likely came from. This skill can be used to gain 1 success in this challenge.

Stage 2: Unexpected Obstacles

After achieving 2 successes, the party must deal with hazards and obstacles that might injure or slow them. Getting around these problems takes about an hour.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics

Acrobatics or Athletics (DC 14, group check): The party follows the tracks into a forest, where progress is blocked by a dry river bed filled with branches. A successful check means that the characters climb or jump across safely, earning 1 success toward the skill challenge. On a failed group check, the party blunders through the obstacle but still earns 1 success in addition to incurring a failure. In addition, each character who failed the check loses 1 healing surge from injuries sustained in crossing the terrain. This skill can be used to gain 1 success in this challenge.

Secondary Skill: Endurance, Nature

Endurance (DC 14, group check): Tracking the goblins is an arduous task over difficult ground. A successful check keeps the group moving without undue exhaustion.

Nature (DC 14): The character uses his or her knowledge of vegetation and terrain to help the party move past the hazard. A successful check grants a +2 bonus to Acrobatics or Athletics checks made during the group check described above.

Stage 3: Arrival

After 3 successes, the characters can approach the goblins' hideout.

Primary Skills: Nature, Stealth

Nature or Stealth (DC 14, group check): The party locates the Wolf Den, at whose entrance a bugbear warrior stands guard. If the group check succeeds, the adventurers approach without being noticed. In addition, they gain surprise in Tactical Encounter 2. On a failed check, the party's approach alerts the guard. However, the party still earns 1 success in addition to incurring a failure.

Secondary Skills: Perception, Thievery

Perception (DC 14): The character scouts ahead to avoid goblin lookouts. A successful check grants a +2 bonus to Stealth checks made during the group check described above.

Thievery (DC 21): The character uses sneaky tricks to assist the party in finding short cuts through the woods. A success grants a +2 bonus to Stealth checks made during the group check described above. On a failure, the characters instead take a –2 penalty to the Stealth check.

Success: The adventurers arrive at the goblins' lair and surprise the sentry outside the entrance.

Failure: The adventurers stumble across the Wolf Den, whose sentries are expecting them. Add another goblin wolf rider to Tactical Encounter 2 (page 11).

The Wolf Den

Foosteth and his goblin followers lair inside the Wolf Den, a stinking mound of dirt, debris, and fallen trees. Its single yawning entrance, littered with leavings and junk, is guarded at all times. Smoke lifts from crooked chimneys rising from the roof, but these gaps are too small to enter.

The interior of the hill is filthy. The walls are made from packed dirt, rocks, and branches held together with spit and excrement. The floors and ceilings are made of the same materials. Rooms are semicircular, with ceilings about half as tall as the rooms are wide.

1. Entrance

Several bugbears and goblin wolf riders protect the entrance into the Wolf Den to ensure enemies don't wander inside.

Tactical Encounter 2: "Foosteth's Sentries," page11.

2. Common Room

When not raiding and plundering, Foosteth's troops billet in this dark chamber, with goblins along one side and the bugbears the rest. The remains of a cooking fire are in the center, with sleeping pallets strewn all around. Combat from Tactical Encounter 2 might spill into this chamber.

3. The Chamber of Smells

The goblins deposit their rubbish in this sunken area, where slippery, nasty things scuttle forward to eat the offeringss. The creatures here have become aggressive and have snatched more than one incautious goblin.

Tactical Encounter 3: "Things in the Dark," page 13.

4. Trapped Hall

The madness afflicting Foosteth the Fat has infected him with intense paranoia. His delusion is so strong that he has trapped the passage leading into his personal chambers to give him warning should someone try to get the jump on him.

Footchopper Alarm Trap: This trap fills a space 2 squares by 2 squares. Stepping on a pressure plate in the eastern 2 squares causes a nasty scythe blade to sweep across the trapped area. A moment later, bells chime, accompanying the chorus of screaming from the trap's victims.

A DC 14 Perception check reveals a 2-inch tall groove running parallel to the floor for about 10 feet. Dirt and rocks fill the gap. A DC 21 Perception check is needed to recognize the pressure plate on the floor.

A secret panel on the opposite side of the pressure plate (requiring a DC 21 Perception check to find) can shut off or reset the trap. Characters can also use Athletics to jump over the trapped area if they know where it is.

Footchopper Alarm Trap **Level 5 Trap**
Object XP 100

Detect Perception DC 14 or 21 **Initiative** –
Immune attacks

Triggered Actions

Attack ✦ At-Will

Trigger: A creature enters one of the trigger squares.
Effect: A loud ringing alerts creatures in adjacent rooms.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (each creature in the trap's area); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target falls prone, takes ongoing 5 damage, and is slowed (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage, and the trap slides the target to the nearest unoccupied square not in the trap's area.

Countermeasures

- ✦ **Preempt:** Thievery DC 10 (standard action). *Requirement:* The creature must be adjacent to a square of the trap's area. *Success:* The trap is triggered, and the creature can move safely through the area this turn.
- ✦ **Delay:** Thievery DC 14 (standard action). *Success:* The pressure plate is temporarily jammed, rendering the area until the end of the attempting creature's next turn.
- ✦ **Disable:** Thievery DC 21. *Success:* The blade is disabled, rendering the area safe.

5. Hall of Whispers

Foosteth lurks in this room, attended by guards, pets, and norker slaves who serve him in his personal quarters.

Tactical Encounter 4: "Unhinged Mind," page 15.

Conclusion

Defeating Foosteth and his goblins removes only one agency with designs on freeing the gibbering mouther. Eventually, some other lunatic will try to finish the job. The adventurers might decide to destroy the statue, thus raising the ire of Those Who Hear (*Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, page 120). The cultists might want to take revenge for the statue's destruction.

The question remains as to what turned the monster to stone in the first place. Was it a basilisk, a medusa, or something more dangerous, such as a beholder? The petrification might have been the result of a chance meeting, or it could serve some darker, more sinister purpose.

Encounter 1: Howling Host

Encounter Level 5 (1,000 XP)

Setup

5 goblin wolf riders (G)

The wolf riders spot the party from some distance away and close on their position, using natural terrain to cover their approach.

If the party failed the "Investigating the Pillar" skill check (page 6), the goblins have surprise against the adventurers.

When the goblin wolf riders attack, read:

A growling, barking band of wolves bearing goblins bounds across the field.

Tactics

The goblins concentrate attacks on tough defenders, using *wolf's bite* against any they knock prone. Otherwise, they use *mobile melee attack* to strike and move away. They flee if the battle is going against them.

5 Goblin Wolf Riders (G)	**Level 5 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid	XP 200 each
HP 62; **Bloodied** 31	**Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16	**Perception** +3
Speed 8	Low-light vision
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage.	
⸸ **Wolf's Bite** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Mobile Melee Attack** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The goblin moves up to half its speed and uses *short sword* once at any point during the movement. The goblin does not provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of this attack.	
Triggered Actions	
Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: The goblin is missed by a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.	
Knockdown Charge ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: The goblin hits with a charge attack.	
Effect (No Action): The attack deals 1d6 extra damage and the target falls prone.	
Skills Stealth +9	
Str 13 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)	
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin	
Equipment leather armor, short sword	

Features of the Area

Bones: Shattered bones litter the area around the pillar. Any creature that is knocked prone in a square containing bones takes 3 extra damage from the jagged splinters.

Pillar of Eyes: Any creature that makes an attack while on top of the pillar or in a square adjacent to it ignores cover and concealment (but not superior cover or total concealment). The pillar stands 8 feet tall; climbing it requires a DC 10 Athletics check.

Treasure: Other than their equipment, the goblins have nothing of value. However, one carries a bag of bones.

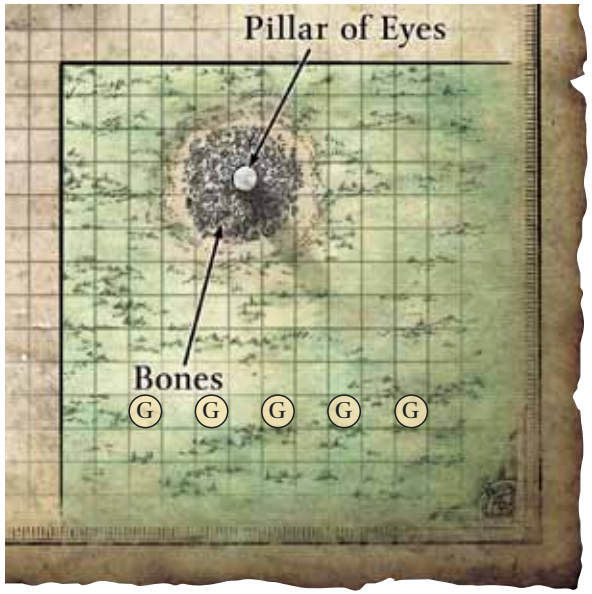
Development

If the adventurers capture one or more of the wolf riders, they can try to extract useful information.

A character can make a DC 10 Insight check to assess the prisoner's state of mind, fears, or something else useful about its personality. A successful check reveals the goblin is not only unhappy because it is a prisoner but blames its master for its misfortune and would be happy to see him fall. This information grants a +2 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks against the prisoner.

With a successful DC 14 Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check, the prisoner reveals that it serves a bugbear, Foosteth the Fat, and that the goblins bring bones to honor the pillar. On a successful DC 21 check, the captive also tells the party that Foosteth wants to awaken the pillar. It admits that the wolf riders attack adventurers to steal their magic, which Foosteth needs for the "ritual of awakening." The disgruntled goblin also provides directions to the Wolf Den, granting a +2 bonus to all Perception checks during the "Tracking the Riders" skill challenge on page 7. (On a failed check, the goblin instead lies about the location and downplays the perils, imposing a -2 penalty on all skill checks during the skill challenge.)

A captured goblin does not participate in combat and flees at the first opportunity.



Encounter 2: Foosteth's Sentries

Encounter Level 4 (925 XP)

Setup

2 bugbear warriors (B)
3 cunning goblin archers (G)

One bugbear sentry is on guard near the entrance to the mound. The other bugbear and the goblins are inside. They don't pay much attention to what's going on outside until the door guard gives the alarm.

When the adventurers enter the mound, read:

A horrid odor assails your senses, an unwholesome blend of filth, sweat, and smoke. A shoddy wooden pen occupies the far side of this chamber, and a rounded tunnel leads into a dark area beyond.

Tactics

The sentry retreats into the complex if attacked from outside. The bugbears maneuver for combat advantage whenever possible. The goblins rush up, fire, and then retreat, using *perfect position* until enemies close, when they instead rely on *mobile ranged attack*. They focus fire on leaders first and then pick off ranged attackers.

The goblins try to fall back into the common room to retain their ranged advantage while the bugbears cut off escape to the outside. A retreating goblin might try to warn Foosteth or lure enemies into the trap guarding Foosteth's throne room.

2 Bugbear Warriors (B) — **Level 5 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 200 each

HP 76; **Bloodied** 38 — **Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14 — **Perception** +4
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Morningstar (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage.

Skullthumper (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature granting combat advantage to the bugbear); +8 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone and is dazed (save ends).

Minor Actions

Predatory Eye ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The bugbear deals 1d6 extra damage on the next attack it makes against a target granting it combat advantage before the end of its next turn.

Skills Intimidate +7, Stealth +9
Str 20 (+7) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment hide armor, morningstar

3 Cunning Goblin Archers (G) — **Level 4 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid — XP 175 each

HP 40; **Bloodied** 20 — **Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16 — **Perception** +3
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Traits

Perfect Position
If the goblin ends its turn at least 4 squares from where it started, its ranged attacks deal 1d6 extra damage until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage.

Shortbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage.

Mobile Ranged Attack ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The goblin moves up to half its speed and uses *shortbow* once at any point during the movement. The goblin does not provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of this attack.

Triggered Actions

Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The goblin is missed by a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.

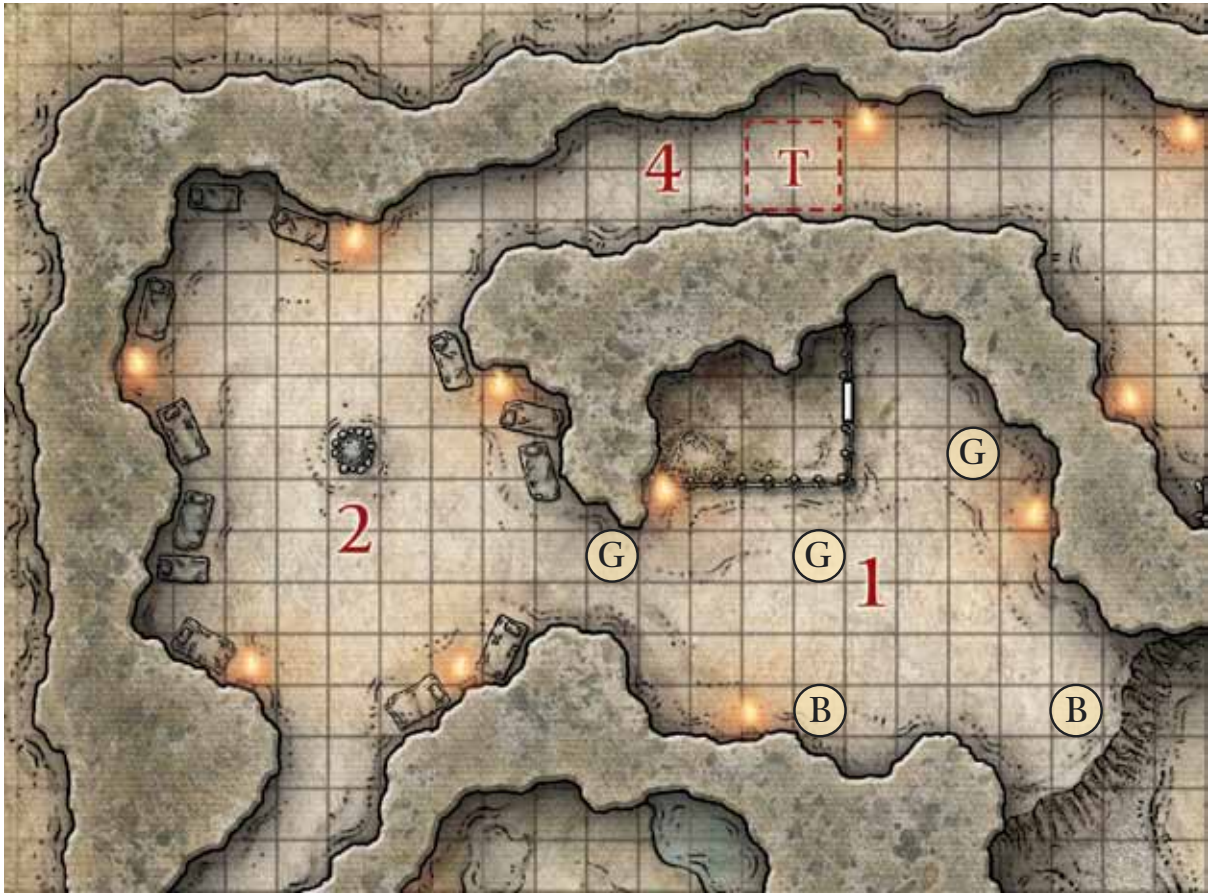
Skills Stealth +11, Thievery +11
Str 11 (+2) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 10 (+2) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment leather armor, short sword, shortbow, 30 arrows

Features of the Area

Illumination: Torches on the walls fill the room with bright light.

Wolf Pen: Moldy hay covers the floor of this shabby wooden pen, which is closed by a gate with a rope latch. Creatures inside the pen have cover from attacks originating outside the pen.

Treasure: The creatures carry assorted coins totaling 140 gp.



Encounter 3: Things in the Dark

Encounter Level 4 (950 XP)

Setup

1 rust monster (R)
4 green slimes (S)

The rust monster hides in the back of the chamber, along with two green slimes that don't have much interest in their companion.

Two other, sneakier green slimes hang on the ceiling over the entry passage.

When the adventurers enter this area, read:

The smell worsens in the dank tunnel, which slopes gently downward. The air is heavy with damp, and the ground is muddy.

When a green slime on the ceiling attacks, read:

A glistening green globule drops from above!

Perception
DC 21: The character notices the green slimes on the ceiling.

Tactics

The rust monster rushes out to attack when it hears noise. The green slimes on the cavern floor follow, while those overhead wait until a character moves underneath. Each readies an action to drop onto the target and gainscombat advantage if it has not been spotted. The rust monster goes for enemies wearing heavy armor but avoids those grabbed by slimes.

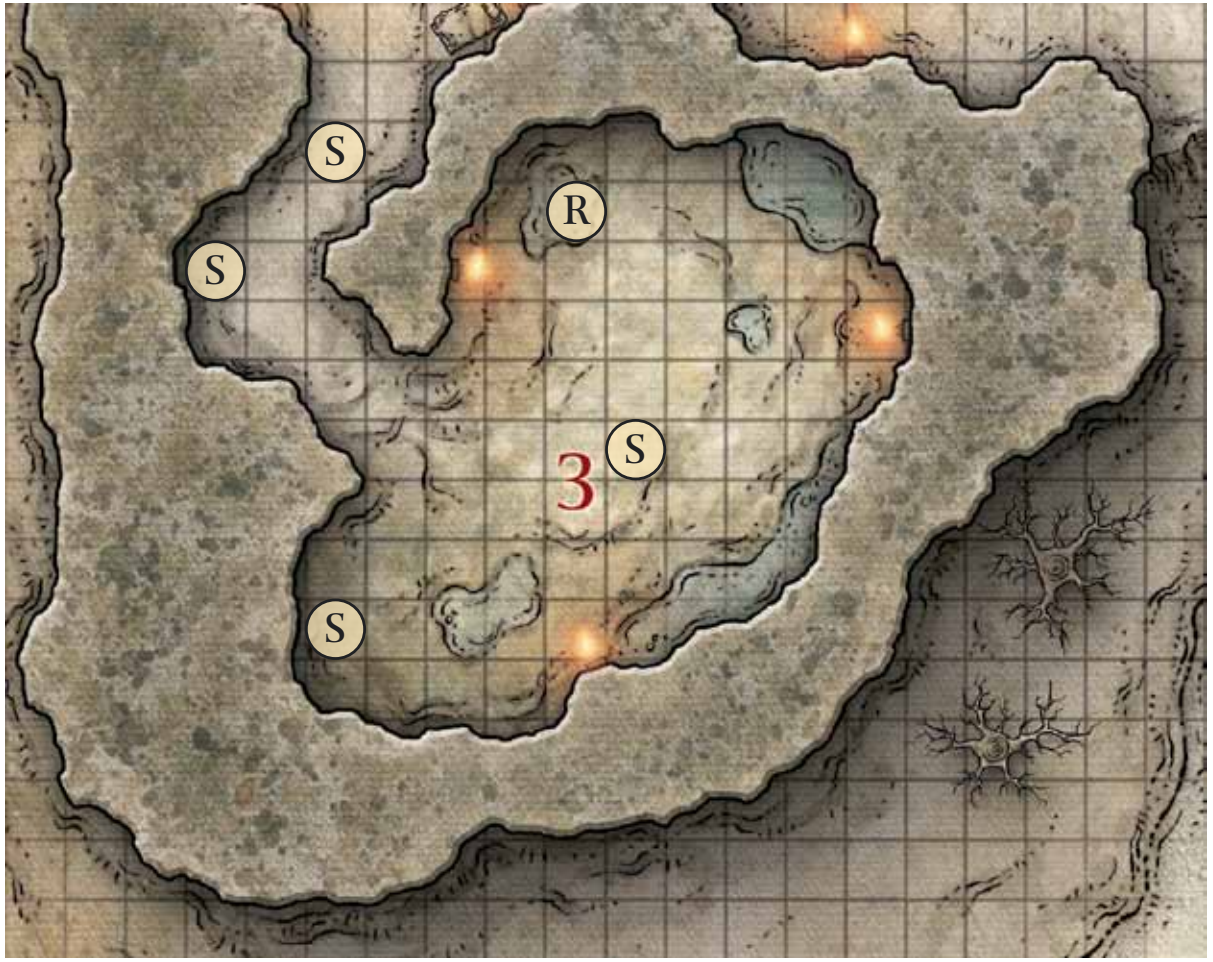
The creatures fight to the death, being unintelligent and having no escape.

4 Green Slimes (S)	**Level 4 Lurker**
Medium natural beast (blind, ooze)	XP 175 each
HP 47; **Bloodied** 23	**Initiative** +9
AC 18, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 20	**Perception** +2
Speed 4, climb 4	Blindsight 10
Immune blinded, gaze effects; **Resist** 5 acid; **Vulnerable** 5 fire, 5 radiant	
Traits	
Ooze	
While squeezing, the slime moves at full speed rather than half speed, it doesn't take the -5 penalty to attack rolls, and it doesn't grant combat advantage for squeezing.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Engulf** (acid) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 acid damage, and the slime grabs the target (escape DC 18). Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing 10 acid damage. Attacks that target the slime deal half damage to the slime and half damage to one creature grabbed by the slime.	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 11 (+2) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 11 (+2)	
Con 17 (+5) **Int** 3 (-2) **Cha** 1 (-3)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Rust Monster (R)	**Level 6 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast	XP 250
HP 66; **Bloodied** 33	**Initiative** +10
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 17	**Perception** +5
Speed 8	Low-light vision
Traits	
Rusting Defense	
Whenever a weapon attack hits the rust monster, the weapon used in the attack is rusting until the end of the encounter. While the weapon is rusting, attacks with the weapon take a -1 penalty to attack rolls. If the weapon used to attack the rust monster is already rusting, increase the penalty to attack rolls by 1 (to a maximum penalty of -5).	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage. If the target is wearing heavy armor, the armor is rusting until the end of the encounter. While the armor is rusting, the target takes a-1 penalty to AC. If the target is wearing armor that is already rusting, increase the penalty to AC by 1 (to a maximum penalty of -5).	
Effect: The rust monster shifts 1 square.	
⸸ **Devour Metal** ✦ **Recharge** if the power misses	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature wearing or wielding a rusting item); +9 vs. Reflex	
Hit: The rusting item is destroyed. If the item was magic, the *residuum* from it can be retrieved from the rust monster after the creature is slain. The *residuum* is worth the market value of that item (instead of one-fifth the value).	
Str 8 (+2) **Dex** 20 (+8) **Wis** 15 (+5)	
Con 10 (+3) **Int** 2 (-1) **Cha** 12 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Features of the Area

Illumination: This chamber is dark.



Encounter 4: Unhinged Mind

Encounter Level 6 (1,290 XP)

Setup

Foosteth (F)
2 bugbear stranglers (B)
2 hungry dire wolves (W)
5 norker slaves (N)

Do not place the norkers on the map at the start of combat. They are hiding behind the curtain and do not join the fight until the third round.

When the characters enter the Hall of Whispers, read:

The hallway opens into a roundish chamber. Seated in a throne made from sharpened bones is a profoundly obese bugbear. A gaudy tapestry stinking of mildew hangs across from the gruesome throne, which is topped by a humanoid skull. Two tough-looking bugbears stand guard nearby. A pair of shaggy wolves growl near a curtain against the far wall.

The adventurers have surprise if they bypassed the footchopper alarm trap in area 4, since Foosteth is confident that the trap will warn him against intruders. Otherwise, all the creatures in the room are ready and waiting.

Foosteth (F) **Level 6 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger), barghest XP 250
HP 84; **Bloodied** 42 **Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 18 **Perception** +10
Speed 6 (8 in wolf form) Low-light vision

Traits

☼ **Aura of Madness ✦ Aura** 3
Foosteth slides any creature starting its turn in the aura 1 square.

Standard Actions

⨾ **Bite ✦ At-Will**
Requirement: Foosteth must be in wolf form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 9 damage.

⨾ **Battleaxe** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Requirement: Foosteth must be in bugbear form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage.

⨾ **Jump Strike ✦ Recharge 5 6**
Effect: Before or after the attack, Foosteth shifts 3 squares.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 7 damage.

⨾ **Power Feed** (psychic) **✦ Recharge** if the power misses
Requirement: Foosteth must be in wolf form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Will
Hit: 3d8 + 5 psychic damage, and Foosteth gains one use of an at-will or encounter attack power that it has seen the target use during this encounter.
Foosteth must use the gained power while in bugbear form and before the end of the encounter. The attack bonus for the power is +11 vs. AC and +9 vs. any other defense. The damage roll uses the ability score modifier of the creature from whom the power was chosen. The damage does not include any bonuses or penalties to the damage roll that the owner of the power might have.

Minor Actions

Change Shape (polymorph) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: Foosteth can alter his physical form to appear as a Medium wolf or a bugbear until he uses *change shape* again or until he drops to 0 hit points. He retains his statistics in his new form. His clothing, armor, and other possessions do not change.

Skills Stealth +10
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 15 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 14 (+5) **Int** 13 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+4)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment battleaxe

Tactics

Foosteth begins by taking wolf form, then springs from his throne with *jump strike* to attack the closest enemy. When he sees an enemy use an interesting encounter power, he attacks that target with *power feed*. If he becomes bloodied and hasn't yet used *power feed*, he uses it to gain an enemy's at-will power. Foosteth exploits *aura of madness* to draw the adventurers deeper into the room and also to position his servants to get combat advantage when possible.

The bugbears wheel out to either side of Foosteth, maneuvering to flank enemies with him so they can use *strangle*. The dire wolves charge the nearest enemy and then stay as close as possible to Foosteth or a bugbear so they can knock enemies prone.

At the start of the third round of combat, the norker slaves roll initiative. They come through the curtain and focus against any enemy that's not already engaged in melee.

All creatures except the stranglers fight to the death. The stranglers are willing to sacrifice themselves only so long as Foosteth lives. If he falls, they attempt to flee when reduced to 15 or fewer hit points.

2 Bugbear Stranglers (B) **Level 6 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid XP 250 each

HP 58; **Bloodied** 29 **Initiative** +11
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16 **Perception** +5
Speed 7 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Morningstar** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage.

⸸ **Strangle** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature granting combat advantage to the bugbear); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 19).
Sustain Standard: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the grab persists until the end of the bugbear's next turn.

Minor Actions

Predatory Eye ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The bugbear deals 1d6 extra damage on the next attack it makes against a target granting it combat advantage before the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Body Shield ✦ **Recharge** ⚀ ⚁ ⚂
Trigger: An enemy makes a melee or ranged attack against the bugbear's AC or Reflex while the bugbear is grabbing a creature.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The grabbed creature becomes the target instead. The bugbear can't use this power to redirect attacks made by a creature it is grabbing.

Skills Intimidate +8, Stealth +12
Str 18 (+7) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 10 (+3)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment leather armor, morningstar, rope garrote

2 Hungry Dire Wolves (W) **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Large natural beast XP 175 each

HP 59; **Bloodied** 29 **Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16 **Perception** +9
Speed 8 Low-light vision

Traits

Pack Harrier
The wolf has combat advantage against any enemy that is adjacent to one or more of the wolf's allies.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, or 3d6 + 5 damage against a prone target. The target falls prone if the wolf has combat advantage against it.

Str 19 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 19 (+6) **Int** 5 (-1) **Cha** 11 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

5 Norker Slaves (N) **Level 3 Minion Soldier**
Small elemental humanoid XP 38 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +4
AC 19, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13 **Perception** +1
Speed 6 Low-light vision

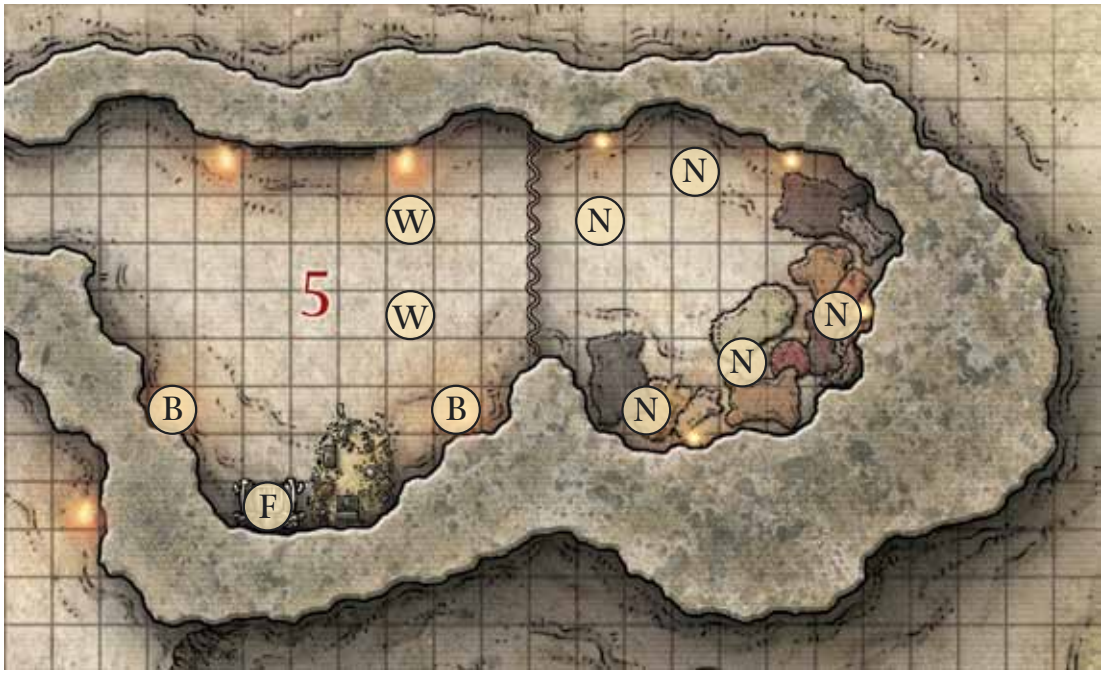
Standard Actions

⊕ **Battleaxe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage, and the target is marked until the start of the norker's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Horrid Endurance ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The norker takes damage from an attack by an enemy adjacent to it.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The norker gains resist 5 all against the triggering attack. If the norker takes no damage from the attack, the triggering attacker takes 5 damage.

Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 17 (+4) **Int** 6 (-1) **Cha** 7 (-1)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment battleaxe



Features of the Area

Illumination: Candles burn in wall nooks in the walls throughout the throne room and Foosteth's quarters, filling the area with dim light.

Curtain: A heavy curtain separates the throne room from Foosteth's quarters. Entering a square containing the curtain costs 2 squares of movement. A DC 10 Strength check (standard action) pulls the curtain down.

Jagged Throne: A hideous chair made from human bones stands against the south wall. The bones jab out at odd angles. Any creature forcibly moved into the throne's space takes 5 damage.

Possessed Skull: Foosteth has attached the skull of the slain cultist to his throne as a trophy. When the barghest is slain, the cultist's essence slips free and returns to the skull. The skull's eye sockets glow with power, and it rolls initiative and attacks.

Tapestry: A mildewed tapestry hangs on the north wall, depicting battle scenes involving various humanoids. It is too damaged to be worth anything but can be pulled off the wall to hinder nearby enemies.

Tapestry	**Single-Use Terrain**
A quick tug, and the tapestry hanging on the wall flutters to the ground, trapping anyone next to it.	
Standard Action	
Requirement: You must be adjacent to the tapestry.	
Check: DC 14 Athletics.	
Success: The tapestry falls.	
Target: Each creature in a close blast 3 adjacent to the tapestry	
Attack: +9 vs. Reflex	
Hit: The target is blinded and slowed until it is no longer underneath the tapestry.	

Treasure: Foosteth keeps his loot in a pile in his quarters. It includes a 7th-level magic item, a ritual scroll of Remove Affliction, and 420 gp worth of *residuum* in a glass phial.

Possessed Skull Object	**Level 6 Trap** XP 100
Detect automatic	**Initiative** +2
HP 5	
AC 10, **Fortitude** 5, **Reflex** 10, **Will** –	
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage	
Standard Actions	
Close Power ✦ At-Will	
Requirement/Effect: Foosteth must be dead.	
Attack: Close burst 5 (one creature in the burst); +9 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is dazed until the start of the skull's next turn, and the skull slides each creature adjacent to the target 1 square.	
Countermeasures	

✦ **Control:** Any creature that picks up and holds the skull can choose its target, but if the attack misses, the creature holding the skull takes 5 psychic damage.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Player's Handbook 3*, *Martial Power 2*, and *Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons*. In addition, he's a regular contributor to both Dragon and Dungeon magazines. Robert lives, works, and will probably die in Tennessee.

HEROIC
1–10

Down the Goblin Hole

By Gareth Hanrahan

illustration by Empty Room Studios, Jeffrey Lai ✦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

TM & © 2010 Wizards of the Coast LLC All rights reserved.

CHAOS SCAR™

Down the Goblin Hole is a short adventure for five 2nd-level characters. The Goblin Hole is located in the woods near the southeastern corner of the Chaos Scar. While several reasons for the characters to seek out the Goblin Hole are provided in the "Getting Started" section, it's also possible that the party just randomly encounters goblins from the Hole while traveling in the Chaos Scar. If you're not running a Chaos Scar campaign, then you can easily remove the distinctive elements of that setting, such as Urgog's fragment of the magical meteor, and replace them with elements more suited to your game. The meteor fragment could be a stolen drow relic, for example, or perhaps a portal to some outer plane lies at the bottom of the Hole.

The adventure's encounters are designed to upset established tactics and force players to think creatively. The fights themselves are hard enough, but it's the unusual terrain and the waves of foes that make the combats memorable. Once a fight starts, the players should feel as if everything is spinning out of control and they are about to be overrun. That said, the goblins can also be played for humor in places—there are plenty of absurd elements and opportunities for slapstick in the adventure. Feel free to throw your players off cliffs and dump them into pits full of spiders and slime.

BACKGROUND

"What do you do with a lying rogue?
Throw him down the goblin hole!
What do you do with a damned soul?
Throw him down the goblin hole!
Oh, the goblin hole, the goblin hole,
Hell's at the bottom of the goblin hole!"
–Traditional drinking song east of the King's Wall

No matter how inhospitable, barren, or simply vile a place is, some creature calls it home. There are monsters who dwell in the depths of the world, so far underground that the sun is a wild legend and even light is a rarity beyond compare. There are things who dwell in bubbling lava, in the icy wastes of the uttermost north, or in the harshest of deserts. The Goblin Hole is not quite so dangerous as those places, but it is a place only goblins could love—a steep-sided pit filled with ordure, strange fungal growths, thousands of nasty spiders, and squirming things with odd numbers of legs. In the past, adventurers have descended into the Hole and cleared out the denizens, but the goblins always return.

The current chieftain of the local goblins and self-styled 'King of the Hole' is Urgog the Mangler, who in his youth was a feared goblin warrior. In those years, he and his marauders raided human villages and put elf-woods to the torch. It is said that Urgog personally slew hundreds and that his tent was made out of the flayed skin of adventurers and knights who tried to stop his rampage. Eventually, the short lifespan of goblin-kind caught up with Urgog. His strength and cunning faded and his warband suffered a series of defeats. They were driven deep into the Chaos Scar, where most of the goblins perished and there was no further sign of Urgog the Mangler for years. It was assumed that he had been destroyed by some greater monster.

In fact, the goblin survived. In the scar, Urgog found an ugly lump of magical crystal, a shard of the meteor that made the scar long ago. Fearing that some thief might steal his prize, he took the shard to a place where it would be safe and secure—the bottom of the Goblin Hole!

Once Urgog took up residence in the hole, other goblins were drawn there. Today, he rules over a tribe of some fifty goblins. The eldritch influence of the chaos shard in Urgog's possession has given the goblins a strange affinity with the spiders who also infest the hole. Since Urgog arrived, the spiders have grown larger and more intelligent.

The most powerful of these spiders has transformed into an unusually intelligent horror, a feyspitter spider that is now the power behind Urgog's throne. At night, the spider whispers into Urgog's ear, advising him on how to manipulate his followers and expand his influence. For his part, Urgog is quite happy to have a giant, intelligent spider in the Goblin Hole. It's an impressive pet and a useful ally. He dreams of a horde of spider-riding goblins swarming over the world, conquering everything that stands in their path.

Once again, goblin raiders shouting Urgog's name are attacking human settlements. Once again, brave adventurers must go down the Goblin Hole.

Dungeon Tiles

All of this adventure's maps were constructed with one set each of the D&D Dungeon Tile sets *Caves of Carnage* (DU3) and *Sinister Woods* (DU5). The map for encounter 1 uses tiles from *Sinister Woods*. The maps for encounters 2 and 3 draw on *Sinister Woods* and *Caves of Carnage*.

Treasure

The characters should earn a total of five treasure parcels in this adventure. Listed below are the most likely places to find treasure and what each parcel should contain. (When placing magic items, consult your players' wish lists, if any).

Parcel 1: Level 5 item—in Urgog's hoard
Parcel 2: Level 3 item—in Urgog's hoard
Parcel 3: 260 gp—in Urgog's hoard
Parcel 4: 170 gp—on the corpse of a traveler caught in the webs in Encounter 1
Parcel 5: Potion of Healing and 10 gp—buried under the slime in the pit trap in Encounter 2

To make Urgog into a tougher challenge, give him suitable magic items and have him use them in the battle against the player characters.

SYNOPSIS

Urgog's goblins control the forests around the Goblin Hole, so the characters must first deal with the goblin guards and patrols. Once past this outer line of defenses, the adventurers must make the perilous descent into the Goblin Hole itself, down a web-lined cliff. There, they battle more goblins and spiders before going underground and slaying Urgog and his followers.

Getting Started

There are several ways to get the characters involved in this adventure. Pick one of these plot hooks or just have the characters encounter the Goblin Hole as they travel through the Chaos Scar.

- Goblin raiders were sighted east of the King's Wall. Traditionally, the goblins have used the Goblin Hole as a base in that area. Someone should investigate the hole and find out how the goblins were able to cross the wall so easily. (They scaled the wall on the backs of their spider minions.) Worryingly, some of the goblins were shouting the name Urgog as a battle-cry.
- Magical divinations by a friendly cleric (perhaps Chendera, the half-elf cleric who oversees the temple of Avandra at Restwell Keep), point to the existence of some growing threat in the depths of the woods. Unless stopped, this threat may grow too powerful to be dealt with easily, so heroes must put an end to it quickly. The cleric advises the characters to seek out the rumored "Goblin Hole" and begin investigating there.
- Another adventurer encountered a band of goblins crossing through the lands east of the Scar. These goblins were pushing a crudely-made cart laden with swords, helmets, and other booty. The adventurer captured one of the goblins and questioned the wretch, who revealed that the cart was "tribute for Urgog the Mangler, King of the Goblin Hole."

Research

A History roll (DC15) or consulting with local greybeards (such as the silver-masked mage Citirian at Restwell Keep) lets the characters find out that Urgog was once a feared goblin warlord, but no one has heard of him in more than ten years.

Down the Goblin Hole

After crossing the King's Wall, the characters travel into the woodlands in the south of the Chaos Scar. The forests here are thick and dark, with few clear trails. In places, the trees are strangely twisted and mutated by the malign influence of the Scar. Initially, the adventurers do not encounter any threatening beasts, but they cannot escape the feeling that they are being watched by inhuman eyes in the dark of the woods.

Goblin Ambush

As they approach the Goblin Hole, characters see signs of the goblins—footprints, discarded arrowheads, small paths cut through the underbrush, and the stumps of smaller trees cut down for firewood. If the characters blunder on through the woods, then they automatically run into the goblin ambush (Encounter 1). If they proceed carefully, run the optional skill challenge, Ambushing the Ambushers.

Tactical Encounter 1: The Goblin Ambush

Skill Challenge: Ambushing the Ambushers

Level: 3 (150 XP)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Nature, Perception, Stealth

Nature (DC15): The character notices that there are many fresh goblin footprints and spider tracks in this area. Goblins must be nearby.

Perception (DC15): The character spots some mud and broken twigs on the lower branches of one tree, suggesting that something climbed it recently.

*Stealth (DC15):*The character conceals himself amid the underbrush and advances quietly, thereby avoiding the goblin sentries.

Success: If the characters succeed, they are able to avoid being ambushed by the goblins and they do not start Encounter 1 caught in the spider-webs.

Failure: The characters stumble into the trap at the start of Encounter 1.

The Goblin Hole

After defeating the goblins, the characters arrive at the edge of the Goblin Hole. Three sides of the ravine are too steep to climb, but the fourth offers a way down. It's almost as steep, but that section of the cliff face is covered with a thick carpet of spider webs and vines. The characters can climb down the webs to the bottom of the ravine.

Tactical Encounter2: The Webwall

Once the goblins in the ravine are dealt with, the characters can descend into the Goblin Hole proper—the caves under the ravine. The cave walls are covered in fungal growths and more spider webs. In places, the characters must clamber down steep and treacherous slopes, as the caves are arranged one atop the next. Each step brings the characters deeper underground. A quick retreat is impossible.

There are signs of goblins everywhere—chewed bones, dirty blankets, discarded trash, and insulting messages or strange ritual symbols daubed onto the walls. The goblins living in the caves dare not confront powerful invaders directly. They will wait for Urgog the Mangler to slay the trespassers.

The Bottom of the Hole

After slipping and sliding through three smaller chambers, you arrive at a larger cave. In the center of the floor is a large hole which leads into a still deeper cavern. Crude rope ladders are tied to stalagmites that dangle into the hole, and you can see torchlight from below. A voice roars from beneath you. 'I am Urgog the Mangler, Urgog the war-chief, the King of the Goblin Hole! Come down and fight! Come down and die!' After a momentary pause, the voice says 'are you sure they're up there? I can't hear anything!'

A Perception check (DC15) lets the characters hear a strange, chittering noise: the speech of the feyspitter spider assuring Urgog that the adventurers are indeed close at hand. It's impossible to use missile attacks to strike at Urgog or his guards from the upper cavern, so the characters must climb down the ladders to slay the goblin chieftain.

Tactical Encounter 3: Bottom of the Hole.

Once Urgog and his followers are slain, the characters can loot the treasure trove under the goblin king's throne.

Encounter 1: Goblin Ambushers

Encounter Level 2 (701 XP)

Setup

4 goblin snipers (G)
2 bloodthorn vines (V)
1 deathjump spider (D)
4 spiderlings (S)

The goblin snipers are in the trees, 15 feet above the ground. The deathjump spider also starts in the trees but jumps down to join the fight as soon as battle begins.

If the characters failed or did not attempt the "Ambushing the Ambushers" skill check, then read the following aloud before setting up the encounter.

As you make your way through the forest, you spot something glistening between two trees. It's a strand of spider web, so thin as to be almost invisible if it were not for some droplets of dew. Looking more closely, you realize that there's a full web stretching between those two trees ... and the trees next to them. You're hemmed in on all sides by webbing.

It's a trap!

The characters start in the web-covered area at the bottom of the map. If a character tries to move out of this area, then he must make a DC20 Athletics check or be restrained (save ends).

If the characters succeeded in the skill check, read the following section aloud instead.

Just in time, you spot a cunningly hidden spider web stretching between two trees. You cautiously make your way around the web and find several other, similar webs between other trees. You came close to falling into someone's trap ...

In this case, the characters start in the open beyond the web-covered area.

Tactics

The goblin snipers stay in the trees and keep firing, targeting characters caught in the spider web if possible. If the characters get too close, they move through the trees to keep out of melee range.

The bloodthorn vines stay in the middle of the battlefield and use their *impaling thorns* and *pulling vines* to drag grabbed characters back toward the bottom of the map, away from the snipers. The vines attack melee characters first.

The deathjump spider uses its *death from above* attack to move quickly around the battlefield. Ideally, it knocks down the character nearest to the goblins to give the bloodthorn vines a chance to grab and drag that character. If none of the heroes are close to the goblins, then the deathjump spider tries to set up flanking attacks with the spiderlings and vines. When surrounded, it uses *prodigious leap* to flee back to the safety of the trees.

The characters should be outnumbered at least two-to-one in this encounter. Use that initial shock for all it's worth, because the players will realize quickly that eight of their foes are minions and the situation isn't as bad as it looks.

Development

A clear trail leads off from the ambush site toward the Goblin Hole.

Searching the webbed copse of trees turns up the corpse of another adventurer who wandered into the trap and starved to death. His body has been sucked dry by the spiders, but his equipment is still intact. Characters can salvage a longsword, leather armor, and 170 gold pieces from the corpse.

4 Goblin Snipers (G)	Level 1 Minion Artillery
Small natural humanoid	XP 25 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +3
AC 13, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	**Perception** +1
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Traits	
Sniper	
If the goblin misses with a ranged attack while hidden, it remains hidden.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
➳ **Shortbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: The goblin is missed by a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.	
Skills Stealth +8, Thievery +8	
Str 13 (+1) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)	
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 8 (-1)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin	
Equipment leather armor, short sword, shortbow, 20 arrows	

Deathjump Spider (D)	Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast (spider)	XP 175
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26	**Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +7
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Tremorsense 5
Resist 5 poison	
Traits	
Web Walk	
The spider ignores difficult terrain composed of webs.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
⸸ **Death from Above** ✦ **Recharge** ⚃ ⚄ ⚅	
Effect: The spider jumps up to 6 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. After the jump, the spider uses *bite*, knocking the target prone on a hit.	
Move Actions	
Prodigious Leap ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The spider jumps up to 10 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +8	
Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+2)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 8 (-1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

4 Spiderlings (S)	Level 4 Minion Skirmisher
Small natural beast (spider)	XP 44 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +3
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Tremorsense 5
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2 poison damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 poison until the end of the spiderling's next turn. If the target already has vulnerability to poison damage, increase the vulnerability by 2.	
Skills Acrobatics +9	
Str 11 (+2) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 10 (+2) **Int** 4 (-1) **Cha** 7 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

2 Bloodthorn Vines (V)	Level 2 Soldier
Medium natural beast (plant)	XP 125 each
HP 41; **Bloodied** 20	**Initiative** +3
AC 18, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 14	**Perception** +3
Speed 5 (forest walk)	Blindsight 10
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Striking Vine** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.	
⸸ **Impaling Thorn** (healing) ✦ **Recharge** when the vine doesn't have a creature grabbed	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the vine grabs the target.	
Sustain Standard: The vine sustains the grab, the target takes 2d8 + 4 damage, and the vine regains 5 hit points.	
Minor Actions	
Pulling Vines ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The vine shifts 1 square, pulling any creatures it has grabbed into spaces adjacent to it.	
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 14 (+3)	
Con 17 (+4) **Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 6 (-1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

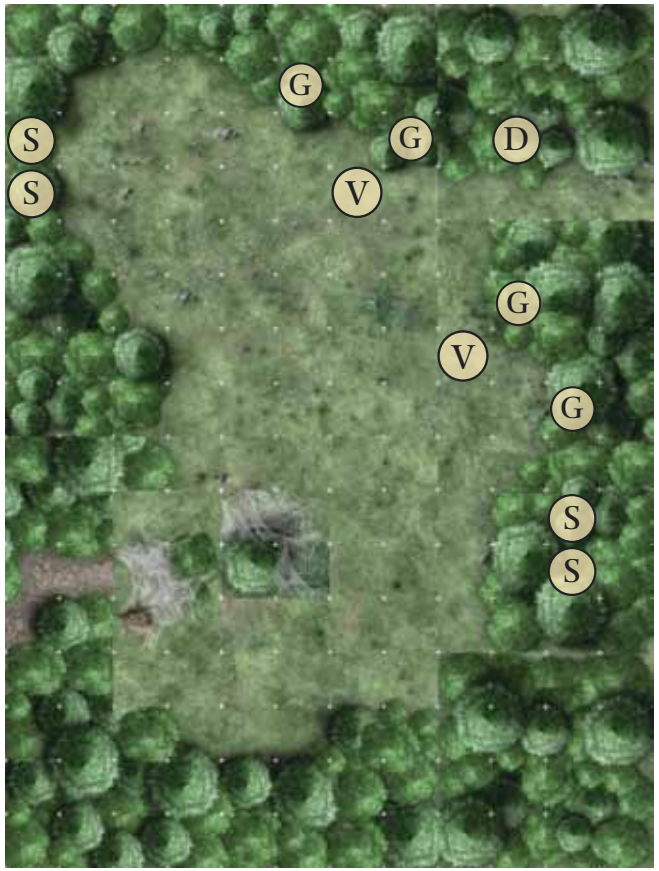
Features of the Area

Illumination: It's daylight.

Trees: The goblin snipers have concealment thanks to the foliage of the trees, giving a -2 penalty to attack rolls targeting them. They are 15 feet off the ground, so they can only be hit by ranged attacks or weapons with Reach. Climbing a tree requires a DC 15 Athletics skill check. Goblin snipers deal extra damage against foes when they have combat advantage, and characters grant combat advantage while climbing.

The trees are so close together that their branches have interwoven, allowing characters to move between adjacent trees without needing to climb back down. This is difficult terrain, so the goblins cannot shift using *goblin tactics* while in the trees.

Webs: One copse of trees is covered in sticky webs that trap creatures who blunder in, making that copse into a potential killing ground if characters did not succeed at the "Ambushing the Ambushers" skill challenge; see above.



Encounter 2: The Webwall

Encounter Level 4 (976 XP)

Setup

The cave tiles represent the flat bottom of the ravine. Three sides of the ravine are so steep they cannot be climbed. The fourth side is represented by the webbed tile. This tile represents a wall that is perpendicular to the other tiles—the encounter begins with the player characters climbing down this near-vertical cliff.

At the start of the encounter, place the following foes on the map:

1 goblin hex hurler (H)
2 goblin warriors (W)

There is also a hidden pit at the bottom of the cliff (marked by Xs).

When any character comes within four squares of the bottom of the cliff, the following foes emerge from shadowy holes in the cliff wall. A character who ends his turn within four squares of the cliff bottom can spot the hidden enemies with a DC15 Perception check.

4 spiderlings (S)
2 deathjump spiders (D)

When any character reaches the bottom of the cliff, the following foes emerge:

4 goblin cutters

Tactics

The hex hurler begins by shrouding himself and his allies in a *vexing cloud*, giving himself and the warriors concealment. He then throws *stinging hexes* on any characters who are making good progress climbing down the cliff. Keep one warrior or cutter adjacent to the hex hurler at all times so he can use *lead from the rear* to deflect attacks.

The warriors and cutters stay at the bottom of the cliff, moving enough to take advantage of their *great position* ability as they hurl javelins up at the characters. If they run out of javelins, they form a defensive line and await the characters. If possible, they stay within the hex hurler's *vexing cloud*. The cutters join the fight as soon as a character reaches the bottom—and that includes falling into the pit. They try to swarm the characters and set up flanking attacks for any surviving warriors or spiders.

The spiders can move freely on the webs thanks to their climb speed, so they can position themselves to best attack the characters. They do not use *death from above* attacks while on the cliff wall but may use those attacks on characters who have reached the bottom of the ravine.

While characters cling to the wall, they fight at a severe disadvantage against the spiders (see *Player's Handbook*, page 182). If they jump down to escape the spiders, the goblin cutters rush out, making this an out-of-the-frying-pan-and-into-the-fire encounter. As with encounter 1, the characters could wind up badly outnumbered, but most of their foes are minions.

Development

There's a leather pouch in the slime pit, dropped there by some luckless adventurer. It contains 10 gold coins and a potion of healing. A character who searches the pit finds the pouch with a DC 9 Perception check. A character who falls into the pit finds the pouch through dumb luck if you roll a 6 on 1d6.

Goblin Hex Hurler (H)	**Level 3 Controller (Leader)**
Small natural humanoid	**XP 150**
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23	**Initiative** +3
AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Staff** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage, and the goblin can slide the target 1 square.	
Blinding Hex ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +6 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d6 + 1 damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the goblin's next turn.	
Stinging Hex ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +6 vs. Will	
Hit: The target takes 3d6 + 1 damage if it moves during its turn (save ends).	
Vexing Cloud (zone) ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: Area burst 3 within 10. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the goblin's next turn. Enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the zone.	
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of the goblin's next turn, and the goblin can move it up to 5 squares.	
Triggered Actions	
Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: The goblin is missed by a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.	
Lead from the Rear ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An enemy hits the goblin with a ranged attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The goblin can change the attack's target to an adjacent ally of the goblin's level or lower.	
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10	
Str 10 (+1) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+2)	
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 9 (+0) **Cha** 18 (+5)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin	
Equipment leather robes, staff	

2 Goblin Warriors (W) — **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid — **XP 100 each**

HP 29; **Bloodied** 14 — **Initiative** +5
AC 17, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12 — **Perception** +1
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Traits

Great Position
If, on its turn, the goblin ends its move at least 4 squares away from its starting point, it deals 1d6 extra damage on its ranged attacks until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage.

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage.

Mobile Ranged Attack (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
The goblin moves up to half its speed. At any point during that movement, it makes one ranged attack without provoking opportunity attacks.

Triggered Actions

Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The goblin is missed by an attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.

Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 8 (-1)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment leather armor, spear, 5 javelins

4 Goblin Cutters — **Level 1 Minion Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid — **XP 25 each**

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 — **Perception** +1
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage, or 5 if the goblin has combat advantage against the target.

Triggered Actions

Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The goblin is missed by an attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.

Skills Stealth +8, Thievery +8
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 8 (-1)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment leather armor, short sword

4 Spiderlings (S) — **Level 4 Minion Skirmisher**
Small natural beast (spider) — **XP 44 each**

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +3
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb) — Tremorsense 5

Standard Actions

Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2 poison damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 poison until the end of the spiderling's next turn. If the target already has vulnerability to poison damage, increase the vulnerability by 2.

Skills Acrobatics +9
Str 11 (+2) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 10 (+2) **Int** 4 (-1) **Cha** 7 (+0)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

2 Deathjump Spiders (D) — **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast (spider) — **XP 175 each**

HP 52; **Bloodied** 26 — **Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +7
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb) — Tremorsense 5
Resist 5 poison

Traits

Web Walk
The spider ignores difficult terrain composed of webs.

Standard Actions

Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Death from Above ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Effect: The spider jumps up to 6 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. After the jump, the spider uses *bite*, knocking the target prone on a hit.

Move Actions

Prodigious Leap ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The spider jumps up to 10 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +8
Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 8 (-1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

False-Floor Pit	Level 1 Warder
Trap	XP 100

A covered pit is hidden near the center of the room. Timber covered with flagstones is rigged to fall when a creature walks on it, dropping the creature into a 10-foot-deep pit.

Trap: A 2-by-2 section of the floor hides a 10-foot-deep pit.

Perception

✦ DC 20: The character notices the false stonework.

Trigger

The trap attacks when a creature enters one of the trap's four squares.

Attack

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

Target: The creature that triggered the trap.

Attack: +4 vs. Reflex; a character who falls off the cliff into the pit trap is hit automatically.

Hit: Target falls into pit, takes 1d6 damage per 10 feet fallen, and falls prone.

Miss: Target returns to the last square it occupied and its move action ends immediately.

Effect: The false floor opens and the pit is no longer hidden.

Countermeasures

✦ An adjacent character can trigger the trap with a DC 10 Thievery check (standard action). The floor falls into the pit.

✦ A character can jump over the pit.

✦ A character can climb out with a DC 20 Athletics check.

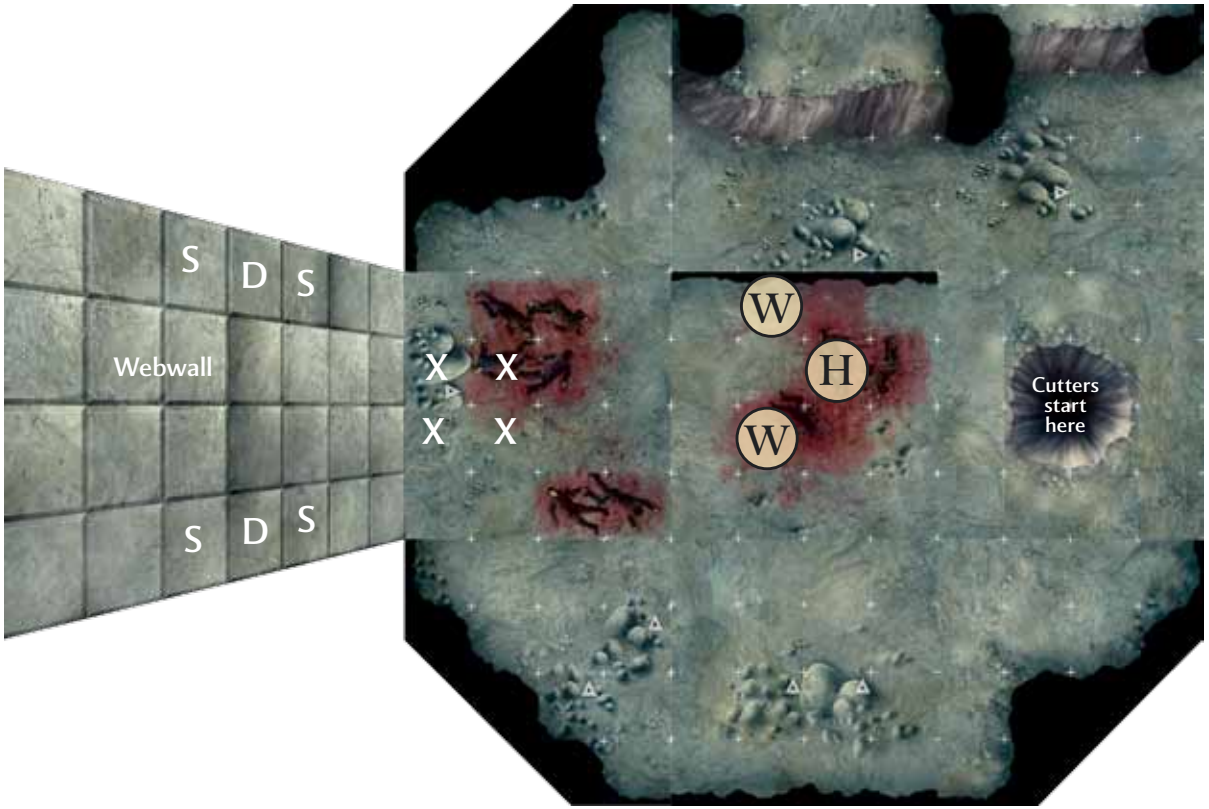
Features of the Area

Illumination: While the steep-sided ravine is in shadow, it's still considered brightly illuminated.

Hole: The hole leads to the cavern under the ravine.

Web-Covered Cliff: Moving along the cliff requires an Athletics check (DC10) to move at half speed. Remember that characters grant combat advantage while climbing. Characters who are pulled or pushed off the cliff or who are knocked prone will fall unless they make a saving throw to catch themselves.

The cliff is 35 feet tall; a character who falls takes 1D10 damage per 10 feet fallen (but see Pit Trap).



Pit Trap: The pit at the base of the cliff is a false-floor pit trap much like the one described on page 87 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Characters who land in the pit take reduced falling damage—1d6 per 10 feet fallen instead of 1d10—because the deep slime at the pit's bottom cushions the landing somewhat (but also makes the walls more difficult to climb). This pit can't be disarmed or disabled.

Encounter 3—Spiders & Goblins & Kings

Level 6 Encounter (1,200 XP)

Setup

Place the following foes on the map at the start of the encounter:

Urgog (goblin underboss) (U)
1 feyspitter spider (F)
2 goblin cutthroats (G)

On round four, add the following foes.

4 goblin cutters
1 goblin warrior

The player characters start in the middle of the cavern.

Tactics

Urgog keeps his two cutthroat henchmen close by at all times. The three gang up on the most dangerous foes, using *goblin tactics* to stay in flanking positions so the cutthroats have combat advantage and can use Urgog's power to grant allies extra attacks.

The feyspitter spider keeps moving and attacking When it uses *bite* or *poison spittle* to slide characters, try to position them in the path of the rockslides.

On round 2, 4 goblin cutters and 1 goblin warrior arrive in the upper chamber. They act as follows:

Round 2: Push rocks down from above. These goblins working together make a single *rockslide* attack as described below. The attack occurs on the slowest of the goblins' initiative points. It is centered on the square marked X on the map.

Standard Action
Rockslide (zone) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Area burst 3 (creatures in burst); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 +3 damage, and target is knocked prone.
Miss: Half damage.

Round 3: The goblins make another *rockslide* attack.

Round 4: The goblins swing down on ropes from the upper chamber and attack. The momentum of swinging down on a rope counts as a charge. They move to link up with Urgog if he is still alive. Otherwise, they just attack the nearest enemies.

Development

The shard of the meteor discovered by Urgog is lodged in the webs of the spider. The characters can cut it free from the webs and take it with them. Its specific properties and hazards are up to you, depending on what plans you have for further developments and what measures the characters take to protect themselves.

Urgog's treasure hoard is in a chest under his throne. It consists of two magic items (Level 5 and Level 3) and 260 gold pieces.

4 Goblin Cutters	Level 1 Minion Skirmisher
Small natural humanoid	XP 25 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	**Perception** +1
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage, or 5 if the goblin has combat advantage against the target.	
Triggered Actions	
Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: The goblin is missed by an attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.	
Skills Stealth +8, Thievery +8	
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)	
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 8 (-1)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Goblin	
Equipment leather armor, short sword	

Urgog (U) (goblin underboss)	Level 4 Elite Controller (Leader)
Small natural humanoid, goblin	XP 350
HP 110; **Bloodied** 55	**Initiative** +4
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16	**Perception** +8
Speed 5	low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
Survival Instinct	
The goblin underboss gains a +3 bonus to defenses while bloodied.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage.	
Miss: An adjacent ally makes a free basic attack.	
Triggered Actions	
Superior Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An enemy misses the goblin underboss with a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The goblin underboss and up to two allies within its line of sight shift 1 square.	
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+5)	
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Goblin	
Equipment: chainmail, short sword	

Feyspitter Spider (F) — **Level 7 Controller**
Medium fey beast (spider) — **XP 300**

HP 80; **Bloodied** 40 — **Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 — **Perception** +5
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb) — Tremorsense 5

Standard Actions

Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).
Each Failed Saving Throw: The spider slides the target 3 squares.

Poison Spittle (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in blast); +10 vs. Will
Hit: Ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).
Each Failed Saving Throw: The spider slides the target 3 squares.

Triggered Actions

Fey Leap (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Trigger: An enemy hits the spider with a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The spider teleports 3 squares.

Skills Acrobatics +11

Str 13 (+4)	**Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 16 (+6)	**Int** 7 (+1)	**Cha** 11 (+3)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** –

2 Goblin Cutthroats (C) — **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid — **XP 100 each**

HP 30; **Bloodied** 15 — **Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Short Sword ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, or 2d6 + 5 if the goblin has combat advantage against the target. In addition, the goblin can shift 1 square.

Dagger ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d4 + 5 damage.

Move Actions

Deft Scurry ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The goblin shifts up to 3 squares.

Triggered Actions

Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The goblin is missed by a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.

Skills Stealth +8, Thievery +8

Str 13 (+1)	**Dex** 17 (+3)	**Wis** 14 (+2)
Con 14 (+2)	**Int** 8 (-1)	**Cha** 8 (-1)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment leather armor, light shield, short sword, 2 daggers

Goblin Warrior — **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid — **XP 100**

HP 29; **Bloodied** 14 — **Initiative** +5
AC 17, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12 — **Perception** +1
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

Traits

Great Position
If, on its turn, the goblin ends its move at least 4 squares away from its starting point, it deals 1d6 extra damage on its ranged attacks until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage.

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage.

Mobile Ranged Attack (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
The goblin moves up to half its speed. At any point during that movement, it makes one ranged attack without provoking opportunity attacks.

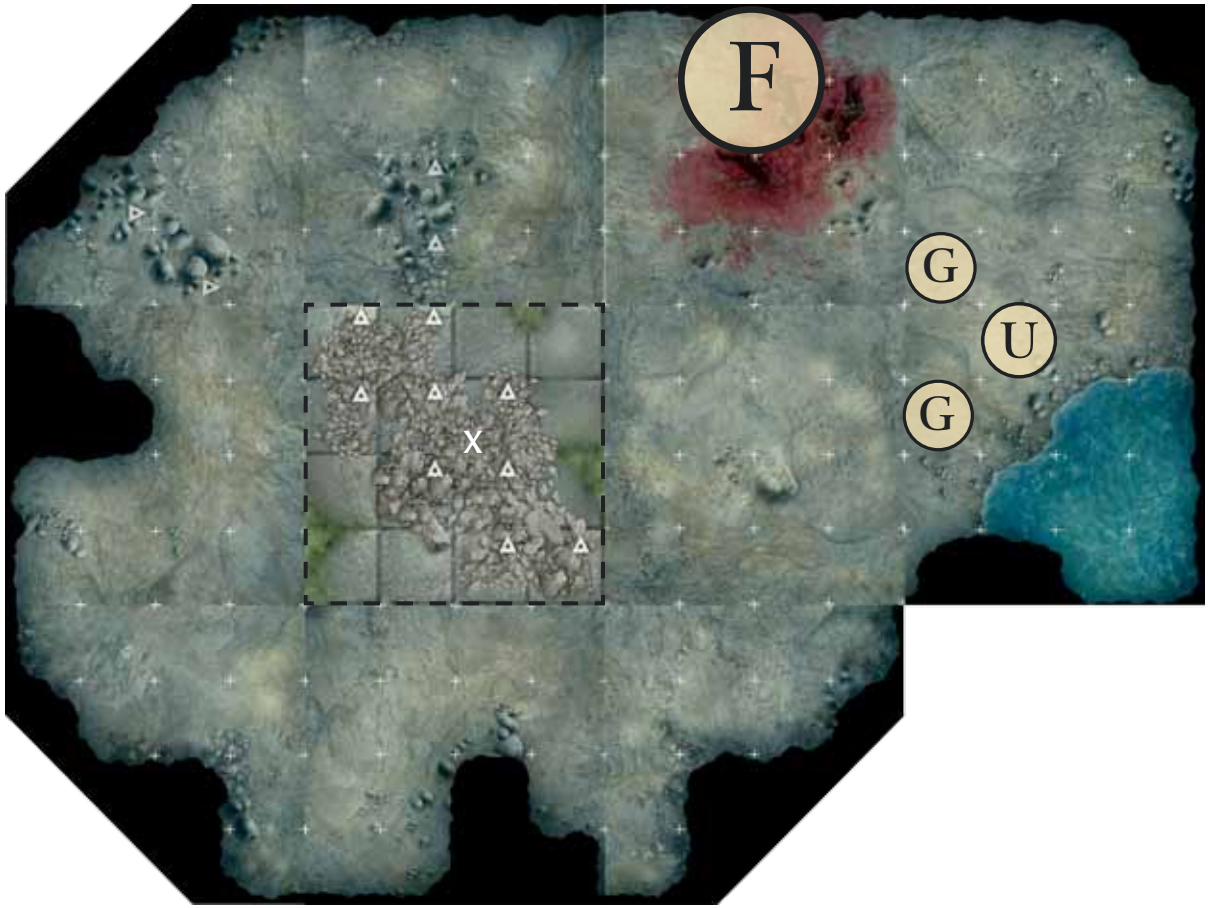
Triggered Actions

Goblin Tactics ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The goblin is missed by an attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The goblin shifts 1 square.

Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10

Str 14 (+2)	**Dex** 17 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1)	**Int** 8 (-1)	**Cha** 8 (-1)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment leather armor, spear, 5 javelins



Features of the Area

Illumination: The webs of the phase spider glow dimly on the walls, providing dim illumination.

Ceilings: The ceiling of this chamber is 15 feet high.

Ropes and Ladders: These aren't shown on the map. They hang from the upper chamber to the lower one, allowing a character to drop into any of the 16 outlined squares.

Aerial Battles

By Robert J. Schwalb

illustration by Chuck Lukacs ✦ cartography by Jason Engle

TM & © 2010 Wizards of the Coast LLC All rights reserved.

Eberron demonstrates magic's full potential. The world showcases the myriad ways in which magical innovation can supplant mundane technology. Everything from fantastical methods for travel and rapid information exchange to the magical warriors crafted to fight in the Last War are among the wonders found in this rich and dynamic world.

While the crackling lightning rails are certain to draw the eye, as do the floating towers drifting above Aundair and the elemental galleons knifing through uncharted waters, one of the more alluring and intriguing developments found in most civilized lands of Eberron is the airship.

What makes these vehicles so exciting are the possibilities they bring to the game. With an airship, terrain obstacles become landmarks for navigation and sites to marvel at from above. A forbidding mountain is far less arduous to an airship than to travelers on foot, and swamp, ocean, or ravine are easily crossed in comfort. The most far-flung places are at hand to those with the courage and will to seek them out from the air. What might have once been an unreachable continent is just a simple voyage away.

Or is it?

Airships provide swift and relatively safe travel at a modest price for passengers, but such voyages are not without their dangers. Storms can whip and fling an airship to the ground. Prowling pirates descend from the great cloudbanks to strike passersby in the air or on the ground, while larger, deadlier monsters may regard an airship as a meal.

This article presents a sample, customizable encounter to demonstrate the sorts of aerial enemies one can find in the worlds of Dungeons & Dragons adventure. The encounter combines the foundation established in the "Fight in the Skies" encounter presented in the *Eberron Campaign Guide* (page 280) with rules drawn from the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Adventurer's Vault* to provide a thrilling and complex encounter where death is just a slip away over the ship's side. "Sky Pirates" is intended for high-Heroic to mid-Paragon adventuring groups. Additional adaptation guidelines make it possible to make the encounter more or less challenging by scaling it up or down and bending it in whatever way you want so that it conforms to your game's needs.

This article draws its greatest inspiration from the *Eberron Campaign Guide*, but you can easily adapt the material for any D&D world. The adventurers might battle sky pirates for control of an earthmote in the Forgotten Realms or wage war against the githyanki over Shom's white deserts during a planar expedition.

This article references the vehicle rules described in *Adventurer's Vault.* While not required for this encounter, having them handy for review will be helpful. You might also find it helpful to review the "Movement in Three Dimensions" and "Flying" rules on pages 45 and 47-49 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* before diving into the rest of this article.

Sky Pirates

Encounter Level 14 (5,890 XP)

Setup

Captain Zilthaal
2 githyanki sky reavers
5 githyanki thought arrows
6 githyanki sky pirates
2 airship pilots
10 airship crewmen

The encounter begins with the adventurers aboard an airship bound for a destination important to the adventure's story. Along the way, Captain Zilthaal, a rapacious githyanki pirate, spots the adventurers' vessel and turns his ship to catch and engage what he believes is easy prey.

When the encounter begins, read:

The clouds pile up into great fluffy mountains that rise high above you and drift in the warm breeze. Below, you see the world in miniature, its farms and fields forming a patchwork tapestry stitched by greenery and threaded by narrow roads. That view is broken by a shout from a crewman which draws your eye to starboard. There you spy a magnificent vessel, equal in size and speed to your own, breaking through a cloudbank.

Perception Check
DC 18: *The stranger's ship flies a crimson flag portraying a winged hourglass flanked by two skeletons. There can be no doubt. Pirates are on your trail.*

When the encounter begins, the characters' vessel is flying at an altitude of 500 feet (100 squares) at an overland flight speed of 15. Zilthaal's ship, *Raptor,* is 50 feet higher (altitude 550 feet, or 110 squares) and is pursuing at the same speed (overland flight 15). The ships are a mere 20 squares (100 feet) apart.

2 Githyanki Sky Reavers — **Level 14 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 1,000 each

HP 134; **Bloodied** 67 — **Initiative** +15
AC 28, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26 — **Perception** +14
Speed 6
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects

Standard Actions

Silver Longsword (psychic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage plus 1d6 psychic damage. If the githyanki has combat advantage against the target, the attack deals 1d6 extra damage.

Blade Dance (psychic, weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The githyanki shifts 2 squares before the attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 5 damage plus 1d6 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). If the githyanki has combat advantage against the target, the attack deals 1d6 extra damage.

Move Actions

Telekinetic Leap ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Ranged 10 (the githyanki or one ally); the target flies 5 squares. It must land at the end of this movement or it falls.

Triggered Actions

Dancing Blade ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The githyanki damages an enemy granting it combat advantage with a melee attack.
Effect (Free Action): The githyanki shifts 3 squares.

Skills Acrobatics +18, Athletics +16
Str 19 (+11) **Dex** 22 (+13) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 14 (+9) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 17 (+10)
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Equipment light shield, silver longsword

Captain Zilthaal — **Level 15 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki — XP 1,200

HP 112; **Bloodied** 56 — **Initiative** +12
AC 27, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 27 — **Perception** +15
Speed 6
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects

Traits

Focused Fire ✦ **Aura** 1
When Zilthaal hits with a ranged attack, each ally within the aura gains a +2 bonus on ranged attack rolls until the start of Zilthaal's next turn.

Standard Actions

Silver Longsword (psychic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 2 damage plus 1d8 psychic damage.

Mindrend (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +20 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the start of Zilthaal's next turn.

Psychic Torrent (psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in burst); +16 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and it cannot use daily or encounter powers (save ends both).

Move Actions

Telekinetic Leap ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Ranged 10 (Zilthaal or one ally); the target flies 5 squares. The target must land at the end of this movement, or it falls.

Minor Actions

Telekinetic Shove ✦ **At-Will**, 1/round
Attack: Ranged 10 (one ally)
Effect: Zilthaal slides the target 1 square.

Skills History +17, Insight +15, Intimidate +16
Str 16 (+10) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 17 (+10)
Con 16 (+10) **Int** 21 (+12) **Cha** 18 (+11)
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Equipment silver longsword

5 Githyanki Thought Arrows **Level 12 Minion Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid XP 175 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23 **Perception** +9
Speed 6
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 7 damage.

Psychic Bolt (psychic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +17 vs. Will
Hit: 8 psychic damage, and the githyanki slides the target 1 square.

Move Actions

Telekinetic Jump ✦ **Encounter**
The githyanki flies 5 squares. The githyanki must land at the end of this movement, or it falls.

Str 15 (+8)	**Dex** 19 (+10)	**Wis** 17 (+9)
Con 13 (+7)	**Int** 11 (+6)	**Cha** 10 (+6)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech

6 Githyanki Sky Pirates **Level 13 Minion Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 200 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +12
AC 29, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 25 **Perception** +9
Speed 5
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects

Traits

Telekinetic Wrench ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura is slowed until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Silver Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 8 damage or 12 damage against slowed targets.

Move Actions

Telekinetic Jump ✦ **Encounter**
The githyanki flies 5 squares. The githyanki must land at the end of this movement, or it falls.

Str 19 (+10)	**Dex** 18 (+10)	**Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 13 (+7)	**Int** 10 (+6)	**Cha** 11 (+6)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech

Skyship
Gargantuan (4 squares by 16 squares) vehicle

HP 400 **Initiative** As pilot
AC 4, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 2
Speed 0, fly 12 (hover), overland flight 15

Traits

Pilot
The pilot must stand at a control wheel, typically at the front of the topmost deck of the airship cabin.

Crew
In addition to the pilot, an airship requires a crew of five, all of whom use a standard action each round to help control the vessel. Reduce the ship's speed by 4 for each missing crew member. At fly speed 0, the ship flies out of control.

Load
30 Medium creatures; 20 tons of cargo.

Out of Control
An out-of-control airship moves forward at half speed. Each round, it has a 50% chance of descending. It descends 5 squares for the first 10 rounds it is out of control. After 10 rounds, it descends 10 squares per round. An out-of-control airship that hits the ground after descending more than 20 squares is destroyed.

Decks
The airship's cabin has four decks: an exterior observation platform, the topmost crew deck, a middle deck for passengers, and a lower cargo hold.

Fragile Propulsion
For every 50 damage the airship takes, its fly speed and overland flight speed drop by 2 squares. At fly speed 0, the ship is unable to travel and floats out of control.

Vehicle Traits
The airship does not provoke opportunity attacks against either itself or the creatures it bears when it moves. An immobilized vehicle cannot move except by a pull, a push, or a slide. Should the vehicle be subject to an effect that would knock it prone, it is not knocked prone but takes 1d10 damage and is slowed until the end of its next turn. If the vehicle is restrained, it is immobilized and cannot be forced to move by a pull, a push, or a slide. If the restrained condition can be ended by the escape action, the vehicle uses the pilot's relevant skill modifier when rolling to escape.

2 Airship Pilots **Level 12 Minion Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 175

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +11
AC 28, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22 **Perception** +8
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 9 damage.

Move Actions

Pilot ✦ **At-Will**
The airship flies its speed in the direction of its heading marker. The airship can move directly forward or diagonally forward, but it cannot turn.

Turn ✦ **At-Will**
The airship flies one-half its speed directly forward or diagonally forward. At any point during this movement, the ship can rotate 90 degrees to the left or the right around its heading marker. The ship can turn only once during a move action.

Stop ✦ **At-Will**
The airship flies a number of squares equal to the number of squares it moved during the previous move action. It can fly directly forward or diagonally forward. At the end of the move, the airship is motionless.

Str 18 (+10)	**Dex** 16 (+9)	**Wis** 15 (+8)
Con 14 (+8)	**Int** 13 (+7)	**Cha** 12 (+7)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common

10 Airship Crewmen	Level 8 Minion Artillery
Medium natural humanoid	XP 88 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19	**Perception** +6
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
Club (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
Crossbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 15/30 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
Crew ✦ **At-Will**	
The crewman keeps the airship's speed at its full value.	
Str 12 (+5) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+6)	
Con 10 (+4) **Int** 11 (+4) **Cha** 10 (+4)	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common	

Tactics

Raptor closes the distance on the characters' vessel by the swiftest available route and levels off to avoid eclipsing the ships (see "Features of the Area"). Zilthaal and the artillery attack the characters and their ship until within 5 squares. The sky reavers and sky pirates then board the characters' ship using *telekinetic jump* or *telekinetic leap*. The reavers focus their attacks on the crew while the sky pirates keep the heroes busy. Meanwhile, Captain Zilthaal and the thought arrows provide covering fire. Should characters board *Raptor,* Zilthaal hangs back to protect his pilot and crew while letting the minions deal with the intruders.

Zilthaal breaks off the attack if *Raptor* drops to 50 hit points or less, the characters' ship ends its turn more than 80 squares away, or if all of Zilthaal's boarding party drop to 0 hit points.

Managing the Vehicles

It's important to keep track of where the two vessels are in relation to one another, both vertically and horizontally. There are numerous ways to do this. We recommend using two sets of percentile dice (d100s): one set to track horizontal range and the other to track vertical range. You can just as easily record the numbers in two columns on a sheet of paper or shift tokens on graph paper; do what works for you. However you handle it, the best method is likely to be the simplest.

The distance to keep track of is the separation between the two ships' bows. At the battle's start, the ships' bows are 35 squares apart horizontally (*Raptor's* bow is 20 squares behind the stern of the characters' vessel) and 10 squares apart vertically (*Raptor* is 50 feet above the characters' vessel).

The focus for this encounter is the characters' airship; thus, it should stand at the center of the battlefield. Treat the characters' craft as the origin point of all measurements and adjust the numbers accordingly when either ship moves. For example, consider a chase between *Raptor* and a similar skyship with its speed reduced to 8 by damage. On the first turn, the bow of the running ship is 35 squares ahead and 10 squares below *Raptor's* bow. The running ship performs two move actions at speed 8 to fly forward and downward. Altogether, that amounts to 16 squares of both forward and downward movement. Adjust the dice to show that the characters' ship is now (35 + 16 = 51) squares ahead of *Raptor* and (10 + 16 = 26) squares below it. If *Raptor* follows the same course on its turn at speed 12, then *Raptor* will finish its move (51 − 24 = 27) squares behind and (26 − 24 = 2) squares above its prey.

Use Dungeon Tiles to build the vessels themselves when they draw close enough for melee. If you don't have tiles, you can sketch the ships on your battle grid for the same effect.

Although both ships have a pilot and crew to manage the vessel, let the players make all decisions about their vessel's movement.

Turning and Heading

Every airship has a heading–the direction in which it currently moves. To track an airship's heading, place a coin or similar marker along the front edge of the vehicle's space on the battle grid. When the airship moves, use the marker to count off squares in the direction of movement. Then move the airship counter or miniature to catch up.

Features of the Area

Falling: A creature that falls from an airship is likely to become paste when it hits the ground. In a combat round's 6 seconds, a falling creature should fall some 200 or so squares. You might advise the players to lower their altitude to prevent an unpleasant and abrupt end to their characters' careers.

Decks: Barrels, crates, coils of rope and the like clutter the decks of both ships. Squares containing such items along with squares containing stairs count as difficult terrain.

Masts: The masts grant cover to adjacent creatures.

Gunwales: The sides of the airship rising above the deck provide cover to characters standing adjacent to them, if the attack comes from off the vessel.

Eclipsed Airships: If the ships are within 3 squares of each other but are at different altitudes, then creatures or characters on the ship with the higher elevation lose line of sight and line of effect to the ship at the lower elevation. As well, creatures on the ship at the lower elevation have line of sight and line of effect only to the ship at the higher elevation, not to characters or creatures on its decks.

Adapting the Encounter

"Sky Pirates" simplifies an aerial battle to what is essentially a boarding party invading the adventurers' ship. Aside from the danger posed by potentially hitting the ground, there are few complications or hazards to interfere with what is essentially a straightforward battle in an unusual environment. The following guidelines can help adapt the adventure to your needs, inject complications, and place the encounter against different backdrops to create a memorable experience for your players.

Scaling the Encounter

As written, "Sky Pirates" is suitable for groups of 9th level to about 15th level. With a little work, you can scale the encounter for use with parties of any level.

Safety Nets: Aside from the enemies, a fall from an airship is the biggest danger a character faces. "Fight in the Skies" pulls off a trick in the *Eberron Campaign Guide* by establishing bridges, walkways, and balconies to catch falling characters. Even if the characters are not fighting over Sharn, you can allow trees, vessels moving at lower elevation, mountain slopes, or something fantastic to catch the character. The safety net should prevent a character from falling farther than what "deadly" severity (*Dungeon Master's Guide,* page 44) allows. If using "Sky Pirates" for 14th level characters, for example, no character should fall more than 110 feet.

Creature Composition: Airship combat is complex. Special rules are required for moving the vehicles with the added complication of fighting in three dimensions. To make your life easier when scaling the encounter, use minions and low-level monsters to populate the opposition. Avoid creatures with powers that can push, pull, or slide (no one wants to take 50d10 damage). If you choose an elite or solo monster, go with a lower than normal level and fill in with more minions.

Altering Opposition

Rather than pitting the heroes against another airship, you could alter the combat so the adventurers face two or more airships, one airship and smaller one-man vessels, or flying creatures.

Multiple Airships: The more airships you add, the more complex the fight becomes, because you must track additional positions relative to the characters' ship. You can reduce the complexity by

- ✦ fixing the enemy ships into formation so that they seldom change relative to one another;
- ✦ setting up the enemy ships so they form a barricade that the characters must pass through; or
- ✦ limiting the number of ships the characters must face at once, either by letting the heroes maneuver so that only one enemy ship is within striking distance at a time or simply having most of the enemy ships stand off and attack with missile fire from long range or move into blocking positions while just one ship closes in for the kill.

Smaller Vessels and Flying Creatures: Smaller single-creature vessels can zip around the characters' airship, strafing them with ranged attacks as they pass by. Rather than using vehicle rules for these opponents, just give them a fly speed of 6 or 8 and no hover ability. This way, they must fly at least 2 squares or fall, giving the characters a chance to knock them from the sky by immobilizing a vessel or otherwise dropping its speed to 1 or 0.

As with smaller vessels, a flying creature is easier to use, because it simply flies where it wants to go without worrying about heading. On the other hand, flying creatures are often designed with attacks that can prove disastrous to characters aboard airships or similar vehicles. A flying ship has nowhere to run from a dragon using its *breath weapon*, so be sure to account for mobility limitations when planning encounters against such creatures.

Victory Conditions

Not every sky battle needs to be a contest won through force of arms. The combat itself might be a complication blocking the characters from attaining a different victory condition.

Race: The characters are racing toward an objective, and time is a factor. For example, the characters have 10 rounds to reach a tower before the mad wizard completes a ritual to summon a demon from the Abyss. At the encounter's start, the tower is 120 squares away, a distance the characters can reach easily in 5 rounds if they double move. At the start of the second round, however, gargoyles, harpies, or another airship intercept and delay their approach.

Escape: The characters have commandeered an airship to flee for their lives. The characters escape when they pass a certain threshold—when they travel 200 squares, for example. A pursuing airship combined with enemy fire from towers below make reaching this threshold extremely difficult.

Chase: An enemy flees from the characters on an airship. The characters must give chase on their own vessel. The foe tries to lose the characters in a narrow ravine, requiring the party to succeed on a skill challenge if they would navigate the maze and keep up with their quarry. Along the way, an enraged dragon strikes the fleeing ship and the characters when they finally catch up.

Environmental Factors

Weather can also shape the outcome of an aerial fight. You can use any of the following environmental factors to add complications to an aerial battle.

Clouds: Clouds can cover all, some, or none of the battlefield. Clouds count as lightly obscured terrain.

Precipitation: Rain, heavy falling snow, smoke, and so on all lightly obscure squares. Snow and ice accumulates on exposed decks. After 3 rounds of moving through snow or ice, the deck becomes slippery and counts as difficult terrain unless a moving character first succeeds on an Acrobatics check against an easy DC. Failure by 5 or more knocks the character prone.

Wind: Powerful winds can scatter airships. Choose a direction for the wind to blow. On initiative count 10, roll any die. On an even number, the wind makes the following attack.

Gust of Wind ✦ special (see above)
Attack: Close blast (flying creatures, falling creatures, and all vehicles on battle grid); encounter level + 3 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The wind pushes the target 1d6 squares. If the target is a vehicle and it is short one or more crew members, the vehicle is pushed 1 extra square for each missing crew member. Out-of-control vehicles are instead pushed 2d6 squares.
Effect: Any creature on a pushed vehicle must succeed on an Acrobatics check against an average DC or be knocked prone.

Lightning: Thunderstorms add lightning to the mix. On initiative count 5, roll 1d6. On a 6, lightning strikes a random flying creature or vehicle or exposed creature on a vehicle.

Lightning Strike (lightning, thunder) **✦ special (see above)**
Attack: Ranged sight (one creature or vehicle); encounter level + 3 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 lightning damage (3d10 at paragon tier, 5d10 at epic tier), and the target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target and each creature within 3 squares of the target is deafened (save ends).

Situational Complications

Finally, several situational complications can create specific challenges.

Locked Ships: Unless the attackers have some means to fly, they will need to secure grapples to hold the opposing ship close enough to board. Securing a grapple is a special action.

Throw Grapple

You hurl the grapple to hook it in place.

At-Will
Standard Action **Ranged** 10/20
Requirement: You must be wielding a grappling hook.
Target: One object or vehicle
Attack: Strength or Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: The grapple is secure until freed (a standard action).

To lock a ship, the boarders must secure a number of grapples equal to half the shorter vehicle's length. Once secured, both ships are immobilized, although they may continue to drift with the wind.

Should one ship go out of control while grappled with another ship, both ships go out of control until the grapples are removed by cutting all the lines; a standard action is required for each.

Ground Support: Some aerial battles may unfold close enough to the ground that enemies can support allied aircraft from below. The eclipsing rule applies to ground based enemies such that if an aircraft is overhead and within 3 squares in any horizontal direction, creatures from below have line of sight and line of effect only to the vehicle, not to its crew. Ground forces almost certainly will need bows to threaten aerial characters.

Final Thoughts

The options described here are but a sampling of what's possible in aerial battles. Such encounters can be as simple or complex as ground-based encounters with fantastic terrain, hazards, and even traps. When adding these elements to aerial encounters, it's simply a matter of visualizing how the element might fit. For example, a Flame Jet trap (*Dungeon Master's Guide,* page 90) could be an armament on a dwarven vessel. A character may roll a boulder (*Dungeon Master's Guide 2,* page 63) off the deck of his ship to smash into an airship below. A roiling red cloud might have the same effect as blood rock, while elemental-charged whirlwinds could wreak havoc on both sides of the encounter. In short, have fun, be creative, and make the fight one your players will never forget.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred role-playing game titles for Dungeons & Dragons, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, A Song of Ice and Fire RPG, Star Wars RPG,* and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Monster Manual 3, Player's Handbook 3,* and *Martial Power 2*. In addition, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Robert lives, works, and will probably die in Tennessee.

DARK·SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

The Dragon's Altar

By Rodney Thompson

illustration by Chuck Lukacs

TM & © 2010 Wizards of the Coast LLC All rights reserved.

The people of Athas have many things to fear, but none more than the Dragon. It is more a force of nature than a creature in Athasian minds, which are haunted by the image of the Dragon swooping over the region and leaving a swath of destruction and defiling in its wake.

In order to prevent their city-states from being destroyed, sorcerer-kings pay tribute to the Dragon in the form of massive sacrifices. Slaves, dissidents, rebels and other undesirables are rounded up and offered to the Dragon in order to placate the terrible beast and buy safety for the despots and those under their control—at least for a while longer.

Most of the sorcerer-kings wisely seek to keep the Dragon from coming close to their domains when claiming their offering. Numerous sites throughout the Tyr region serve as places where the Dragon claims its victims. Most are far from civilization. One of the most notorious sacrificial sites is the Dragon's Altar, a place rarely visited because of its long-time association with the Dragon. The Dragon's Altar is so polluted by the Dragon's powerful defiling magic that the very stones of Athas have been twisted and blackened by repeated exposure to the Dragon's presence.

The Dragon's Altar is located well within the mountains, in a canyon surrounded on all sides by towering, red-stone peaks. The Dragon's Altar is actually within the caldera of an extinct volcano which erupted in a time so ancient that there is no record of it, not even in the vast memories of the sorcerer-kings. A narrow, winding path leads through a crevasse in the side of the canyon, granting access from the outside. At the bottom of the canyon is a single, massive block of chiseled obsidian—the Dragon's Altar itself. Though no one knows who carved this obsidian slab, it has been fortified by some external means—magic, psionics, or something else—to remain pristine despite eons of use as a place of hideous sacrifice. The walls surrounding the Dragon's Altar, on the other hand, have been carved repeatedly by the wretched beings waiting to be claimed by the Dragon. They have left behind a massive, despairing display of pictographs and even the occasional written word telling a tale of centuries of sacrifices to the great beast.

Most sensible people of Athas stay far, far away from the Dragon's Altar, even when no sacrifices are waiting to be claimed. Aside from the taint left on the landscape by the Dragon's presence over the years, there is the (not unreasonable) fear that the Dragon might reappear at any time.

The Dragon's Altar is located in the mountains to the southwest of Gulg and west of the Great Ivory Plain, not far from Altaruk. At the base of those mountains lies an archway of carved stone bearing warnings (in the form of both pictographs and rarely-seen written languages of many of the races of Athas) that the region beyond the arch belongs to the Dragon of Tyr. The archway is not hidden but it is relatively small, so only those who know where it lies (or have a map leading to it) can find it readily. Without such knowledge, one could spend days wandering the foothills of the mountains, expending precious food and water while searching for the entrance.

Once one passes through the arch, a path winds for several miles through the mountains before crossing the crevasse into the caldera where the Dragon's Altar lies. Along the way, dozens of caves lead into darkness. Templars who speak of their journeys to deliver sacrifices to the Dragon's Altar claim that the whispers of the sacrificed dead call out from those caves to anyone who passes by. Those who were brave enough to follow the whispers have never been seen or heard from again—ferried directly to the land of the dead, the templars claim.

The truth behind these whispers is less mystical. A slave tribe, known to one another as the Altar Skulkers, makes its home in the system of ancient lava tubes surrounding the Dragon's Altar. The "whispers of the dead" that people hear as they march toward the Altar are members of the slave tribe trying to lure potential sacrifices away from the Altar and into the safety of the caves before the Dragon arrives. They can save only a few at a time, both because they fear drawing the attention of the templars and because the tribe lacks the resources to absorb more than a few new members at once.

Other than those being sacrificed, templars are the only people of Athas who can openly claim to have visited the Dragon's Altar and survived. Even when the Dragon is not there and no sacrifice is waiting, templars (in well-guarded entourages) sometimes visit the Dragon's Altar on missions for the inscrutable sorcerer-kings. Mercenaries hired to accompany these templars tell stories of the visits, but all are different; sometimes the templars claim to be looking for slaves that escaped the Dragon's wrath, while other times they offer no explanation but spend hours or days performing frightening, arcane experiments on the stone surrounding the Dragon's Altar. Though explorers, dune traders, and raiders have almost certainly journeyed or wandered up the winding path to the Altar, they were either captured and killed by the Altar Skulkers or are too afraid of the stigma attached with standing so close to the shadow of the Dragon to tell anyone about it.

Deadstone

Though defiling magic normally affects only living matter, powerful defiling like that used by the Dragon of Tyr can leave an impression even on stone. The stone in the canyon near the Dragon's Altar has been repeatedly bombarded with the Dragon's defiling magic, and as a result it has taken on unique properties that make it useful when crafting weapons. Deadstone is unusually resistant to magical enchantment, and only the latent defiling power clings to the stone.

Deadstone Weapon — Level 2+

This weapon is carved from stone tainted by the passing of the Dragon of Tyr, imbued with defiling magic that drinks the life of your enemies.

Lvl 2 +1 520 gp Lvl 7 +2 2,600 gp
Weapon: Axes, Hammers, Heavy Blades, Maces
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: 1d8 necrotic damage per plus
Power (Daily): Free Action. *Trigger*: You hit an enemy with a melee weapon attack using this weapon. *Effect*: The deadstone weapon absorbs a number of hit points equal to the damage dealt with the triggering attack. Until the end of the encounter, the first time you would take damage from *arcane defiling*, you gain temporary hit points equal to the amount of hit points stored in the deadstone weapon before you take the damage from *arcane defiling* (no action required).

Lingering Effects

Those who spend time near the Dragon's Altar often experience the lingering effects of exposure to so much of the Dragon's defiling magic. The following Legendary Boons can be given as rewards to adventurers who spend time at the Dragon's Altar.

Awe of the Dragon's Altar — Level 2+

You have stood before the Dragon's Altar, felt the residue of the great beast's passing, and come away changed. For a time, you carry with you a fragment of the power wielded by the Dragon of Tyr.

Level 2 520 gp Level 22 325,000 gp
Level 12 13,000 gp
Legendary Boon
Property: When you use *arcane defiling*, you deal 2 extra points of necrotic damage to each ally affected by the power, and gain a +1 item bonus to the result of the rerolled attack bonus or damage roll.
Level 12: You deal 4 extra necrotic damage, and the item bonus is +2.
Level 22: You deal 6 extra necrotic damage, and the item bonus is +3.

Plague of the Dragon's Altar — Level 3+

Standing so close to the site of powerful defiling magic may have temporarily sickened you, but it has left far worse a mark on you than that. You carry the memory of the Dragon's defiling like a plague and can unleash it upon your foes.

Level 3 680 gp Level 23 425,000 gp
Level 13 17,000 gp
Legendary Boon
Power (Daily ✦ Necrotic): Minor Action. Until the end of the encounter, enemies that end their turns adjacent to you take 5 necrotic damage. This necrotic damage cannot be prevented in any way.
Level 13: 10 necrotic damage.
Level 23: 15 necrotic damage.

Scar of the Dragon's Altar — Level 2+

Your visit to the Dragon's Altar has left you scarred by ambient defiling magic that is the residue of the great beast's passing. That scar is more than just a sign of your visit; it has inured you to some of the harshness of Athas.

Level 2 520 gp Level 22 325,000 gp
Level 12 13,000 gp
Legendary Boon
Property: Whenever a creature, hazard, or trap makes an attack against your Fortitude defense and misses, you gain 5 temporary hit points.
Level 12: 10 temporary hit points.
Level 22: 15 temporary hit points.

Adventure Hooks

There are many ways to use the Dragon's Altar in an adventure—as an adventure site, as a safe redoubt, or even as a bit of background flavor for an NPC or villain. Here are a few suggestions for using the Dragon's Altar for each tier.

Heroic Tier: Low-level adventurers might be sent to the Dragon's Altar by the templars on some errand—collecting samples of deadstone, searching for missing slaves, etc.—or hauled there in chains as victims for sacrifice. Alternatively, rumors of treasures hidden in the caldera of the Dragon's Altar (such as magic items left behind by templars who were accidentally caught up in the sacrifice) might lure adventurers there. If any of the adventurers are escaped slaves, they might seek out the slave tribe rumored to lurk there. In these scenarios, the Altar Skulkers can serve as level-appropriate allies and antagonists alike.

Paragon Tier: At higher levels, visits to the Dragon's Altar likely have a greater meaning in the larger story of the campaign. The Dragon's Altar might be the site of a showdown with an antagonistic templar who has plagued the adventurers throughout their careers. Alternatively, the adventurers might be called on to defend the Altar Skulkers' lair against the armies of a sorcerer-king that learned of the slave tribe's existence and wants to reclaim the slaves for himself. At this tier, likely enemies are templars visiting the Altar, half-giant enforcers from the city-states, or powerful creatures drawn to the Altar by vestiges of defiling magic.

Epic Tier: At this level of play, the Dragon's Altar likely serves as the site of a showdown between the adventurers and a sorcerer-king. Perhaps the sorcerer-king chose that spot for the battle in order to surround himself or herself with vestiges of defiling

magic—or in the hope that the Dragon might appear and do the sorcerer-king's dirty work for him. Alternatively, the Dragon's Altar might be the place where high-level adventurers ambush the Dragon itself, hoping to trap it in the confines of the caldera and end its threat to Athas once and for all.

The Altar Skulkers

The Altar Skulkers are a slave tribe that has lived in the caves surrounding the Dragon's Altar for decades, if not centuries. They use the area's reputation to their advantage; since most right-minded people fear visiting a place so tainted by the Dragon, there are few visitors that the Altar Skulkers need to hide from or kill to preserve their secret. In essence, the superstition about the Dragon's Altar, no matter how valid, serves as the tribe's greatest defense against discovery.

Despite the rarity with which the Dragon's Altar gets visitors, the Altar Skulkers have developed a relatively sophisticated system for warning against the approach of visitors. Lookouts wearing animal skins stained with red clay lurk in the peaks surrounding the rim of the caldera. They relay warnings to one another with a series of hand gestures. These scouts have learned to remain so still while on watch duty that (with the help of their cloaks) they appear to be stones rather than men. When templars or other visitors approach, the tribe moves deeper into the supposedly haunted caves and waits out the visit. If the intruders are few in number, the Altar Skulkers may decide to ambush and slay them, then claim the travelers' belongings for their own. In the rare event that the Dragon comes to the Altar, the Skulkers have plenty of warning. They can retreat through their caves to a place so deep underground that the Dragon's defiling does not touch them.

Lore

History DC 22: The escaped slaves of the Altar Skulkers tribe live in caves surrounding the Dragon's Altar. The first Altar Skulkers were slaves who chose to risk their lives in the dark caves lining the path to the Dragon's Altar rather than face the Dragon itself. The caves led them to a network of lava tubes where they could live without fear of discovery. The Altar Skulkers are a paranoid tribe who want their secret protected at all costs. On occasion, they rescue a few sacrificial victims by drawing them off the path to the Altar. When necessary, the Altar Skulkers send representatives to meet with dune traders at neutral locations and bring back supplies for the entire tribe. They use the spoils of attacks against visitors to the Dragon's Altar to pay for their goods but live a meager existence nonetheless.

Encounters

Members of the Altar Skulker tribe rarely join forces with other humanoids outside of their tribe. They do, however, keep domesticated animals in the caves, particularly those that can adapt well to life in their mountainous home. Many baazrags are kept as pets and are trained as scouts to sense danger. Similarly, a few of the Altar Skulker's best high-altitude scouts (those that stand watch for the approach of the Dragon) have tamed kestrekels that they use to hunt for food while on watch.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast. Originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee, his credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include *Monster Manual 3*, *the Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Fallen Lands*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*, and *Monster Vault*.

Altar Skulker Tribe Scout	**Level 2 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 125
HP 32; **Bloodied** 16	**Initiative** +8
AC 16, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13	**Perception** +3
Speed 6 (earth walk)	
Traits	
☼ Plague of the Dragon's Altar (necrotic) ✦ Aura 1	
Enemies that end their turns adjacent to the scout take 5 necrotic damage.	
Red Clay Cloak	
While within rocky or mountainous terrain, a hidden scout remains hidden even if it loses cover or concealment as long as it does not move, attack, or speak.	
Scar of the Dragon's Altar ✦ At-Will	
Whenever a creature makes an attack against the scout's Fortitude defense and misses, the scout gains 5 temporary hit points.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ Stone Dagger (weapon) ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 3 damage.	
⊛ Hurl Dagger (weapon) ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 3 damage.	
Minor Actions	
Desert Stalker ✦ Recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃	
Effect: The scout gains a +5 bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn. The first melee attack the scout makes on its next turn deals 10 extra damage.	
Skills Stealth +11	
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+3)	
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 9 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment red clay cloak	

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

The Hunter of False Nobles

by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by McLean Kendree

TM & © 2010 Wizards of the Coast LLC All rights reserved.

The Rallyhorns and Roaringhorns are two family names that share a rare distinction: Each is borne by two related noble families. So various Lord and Lady Rallyhorns are in both Waterdeep and Cormyr, and sundry Lord and Lady Roaringhorns are in the same two places. The Rallyhorns of Waterdeep are recent ennoblements. Established since the Spellplague, they are clearly remembered and recorded as originating with Rallyhorn nobles who relocated from Cormyr. These nobles left due to their fury at the writ in which the fifth Azoun to rule the Forest Kingdom curtailed noble powers. The two Roaringhorn families are more distantly related and have existed in both places for centuries; which branch came first is less certain.

Until recently, these families (who are both mentioned here because commoners in Waterdeep and Cormyr often mistake one for the other because of their similar names) were regarded as "good old stock" among nobles. These arrogant, idle, long-established wealthy followers of fashion and their

own eccentricities wore monocles, swilled wine from great goblets, held and attended many revels for nobles and "diversions" at exclusive clubs, and very much proudly did as they pleased. People find them good to have as friends and allies, but they make bad enemies.

However, this perception is now changing—all because of one young man.

A Nightcloak Arises

In current Heartlands parlance, a nightcloak is someone who leads two markedly different lives (usually one by night and the other by day), deceiving most friends, relatives, and acquaintances as to his or her true nature. The classic nightcloak of many tales is the timid, bookish, stiff heir (of either gender) who is a dashing, sword-brandishing adventuring sort by night. Nightcloaks can be villains or wastrels rather than heroes, but there is always something romantic about them, even if it's only a hopeless cause. Nightcloaks are, of course, rarer in real life than in tavern-tales.

Right now, however, at least one is very real—and formidable indeed. Some deem him insane, but if he is, it's the cunning, capable sort of crazed, not the reckless or erratic "wildwits." Across the Heartlands, folk have heard of Heldran "Nightcloak" Rallyhorn, and most believe he's a renegade Rallyhorn (a rebellious member of either branch of the Rallyhorn nobles). That is, after all, what this handsome, charismatic young man claims to be, despite his nickname. He says he's not only noble, but a "true" noble, and he has dedicated himself to rooting out and destroying all "false" nobles. By this, he doesn't just mean those of common birth who pretend to be noble, but actual nobles of proven heritage whose decadence, cruelties, and arrogance have made nobles hated or despised by many.

As for "rooting out and destroying," Nightcloak Rallyhorn means exactly that: driving out, discrediting, and killing all unfit nobility in Waterdeep and Cormyr (for a start). He has founded, and heads, a secretive society known as the Scourge of Corrupt Nobility, who have clashed many times with nobles, both publicly and by night at revels, on the roads, or in clubs and festhalls.

Rallyhorn proudly claims to have slain more than a dozen nobles the Realms are better off without, and he has named thrice that many as future targets unless they repent their ways, earnestly and lifelong. Both the Crown of Cormyr and the Lords of Waterdeep have declared Rallyhorn an outlaw and his Scourges perils who should be imprisoned on sight—but capturing or killing the Nightcloak or his agents is proving to be easier proclaimed than performed.

The Dark Truth

Heldran Rallyhorn is crazy—and isn't a noble at all. He just happens to share a surname with the Rallyhorn nobles. He was born in Crimmor to a horseshoe-maker and his herb-selling wife. He's not so crazy as to really believe he's of noble birth, but he does harbor a relentless, irrational hatred for nobles and all who act noble (everyone who presumes to be better than others and who believe they deserve special rights and privileges because of who their parents were).

Heldran is athletic and agile, and he grew up thieving in Amn. He is good with a wielded or thrown blade and at creeping around, climbing walls, staying alert, and remaining one cunning step ahead of all who seek to entrap him. He can look and act noble when he wants to gain entrance to a club or revel, and he enjoys flirting and dallying with nobles, drinking their wine and joining in their banter. However, he notices and remembers everything while doing so, for future use. If a servant or noble watches him suspiciously from afar, he notices and adroitly slips away before he can be trapped or confronted.

The eight original members of the Scourge of Corrupt Nobility were either fanatics who firmly believed in Nightcloak's cause or people with legitimate grudges against specific noble families who saw the Scourge as a road to revenges they couldn't manage by themselves. Thanks to the influence and guard-buying power of their targets, losses among the Scourges have always been heavy, keeping their numbers small. Increasingly, they are reduced to a few veteran, wily fanatics leading men and women who are opportunists and who have joined Rallyhorn's game for personal monetary gain.

A Crusade Unfolds

The Scourge started by confronting and knifing arrogant, careless lords of Amn and Sembia. They accomplished this with ease, taking down overconfident drunkards they surprised and overwhelmed. The Scourges stole wealth and goods (such as horses and coaches) from several victims to make the deaths seem the result of robberies gone wrong. However, Nightcloak Rallyhorn began making pronouncements in taverns about ridding the Realms of "false nobles." As a result, the weak "it was fool-headed thieves" deception died right then.

As word spread of more and more killings, nobles all over the Realms took note, seeing Rallyhorn for

the danger he is; even before Nightcloak proclaimed it himself, many elder nobles far from the Heartlands said, "If it's the Deep and the Forest Kingdom today, it'll be us tomorrow!" Various nobles, particularly in Cormyr and Waterdeep, moved from being satisfied that this or that longtime rival had been slain, to embracing fear for their own lives. They bolstered their bodyguards. They changed family habits to include far less hunting, wandering, and shopping. In some cases, they hired professional slayers or handy bands of adventurers to hunt down and slay Rallyhorn and his followers. The nobles were not appeased in the slightest when Nightcloak's speeches began to mention aiding and promoting "true" nobles, killing only the worst, and discrediting all others (and in any case, stealing their wealth and property, so as to end any influence they might have in Waterdeep or Cormyr).

Although Rallyhorn and his agents rapidly became fabulously wealthy as they seized ships, entire ship cargoes, mansions full of gems and coins and fine wine, statues, paintings, tapestries, furniture, horses, and more, losses among the Scourges mounted so swiftly that Rallyhorn found himself not just hounded across the Heartlands but almost alone. He turned to hiring adventurers as his agents, outspending the nobles with his newfound wealth, so that adventurers are now fighting on both sides of what merchants increasingly came to call the "scour out the nobles" war.

As bold as ever, Rallyhorn was almost caught and killed a number of times. In fact, some nobles swear to this day, even as the rest of the Heartlands sneer at them, that they killed Nightcloak Rallyhorn.

Darker Truths

Most of the lords and ladies who claim to have killed Rallyhorn are telling the truth—as they know it. Only recently have wizards and warlocks hired by various frightened nobles to trace Nightcloak Rallyhorn uncovered the fact that the leader of the Scourges has taken to protecting himself by hiring doppelgangers to take his shape at all times. Presumably this is so that would-be slayers can't ever be sure to have killed or captured the "real" Rallyhorn. Disbelieving nobles and courtiers dismissed this claim until prominent nobles fought Nightcloak on three separate festival days last year in both Waterdeep and Cormyr—at more or less the same time. So either Rallyhorn raced back and forth through unknown portals no one saw him use, or he employed magic no one has ever seen him wield to teleport halfway across the Heartlands and back again . . . or simultaneous Heldran Nightcloak Rallyhorns were in both Waterdeep and the cities of Suzail, Arabel, and Marsember in Cormyr.

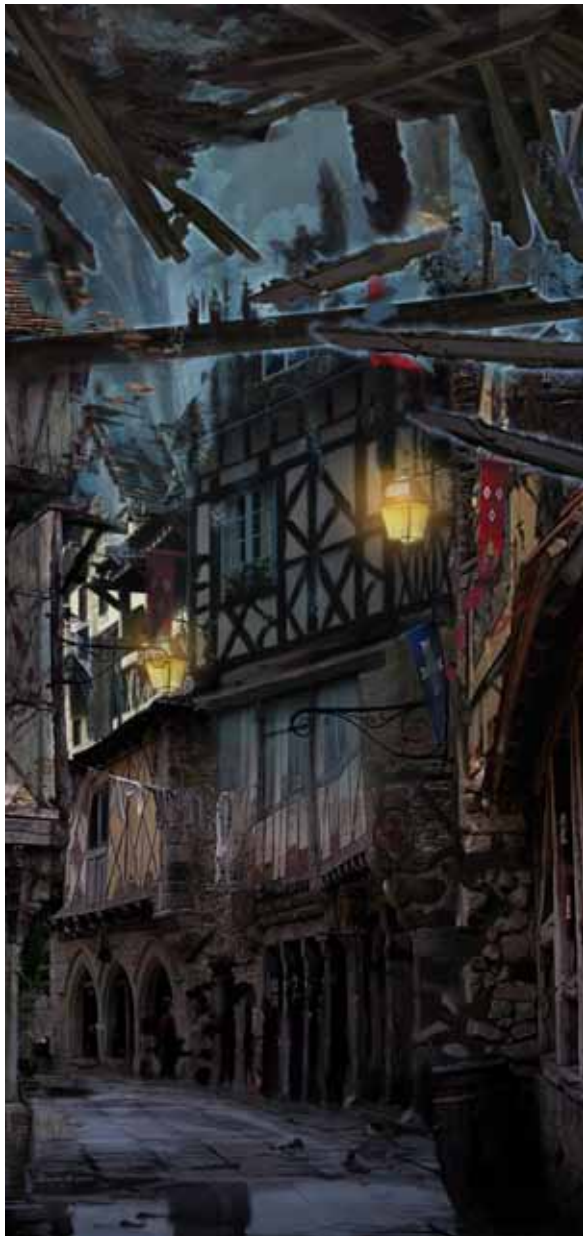
The "we're fighting doppelgangers" belief is swiftly gaining popularity among nobles and courtiers everywhere. For one thing, it saves face for all who've been ridiculed for failing to find and deal with one wildwits and his handful of thugs. However, a few nobles and wizards have now raised a far more sinister possibility: The real Rallyhorn was murdered by a doppelganger some time ago, and an unknown number of doppelgangers are now directing the Scourges in their own bid to end up controlling Cormyr, Waterdeep, or both.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

Campaign Expansion and Contraction

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
illustration by Rob Alexander



Last month, I provided some pretty good reasons why you may want to say no to your players every so often. One of the best reasons is in the pursuit of creating the campaign that *you want to run*. While I'm a big proponent of the idea that good DMs target games toward the preferences and emotional kicks of the players (audience ... cough, cough ... excuse me), there's a flip side to this. As a basic rule of thumb, you should be twice as excited about the campaign as your players are. That might not be realistic, there are some excitable players out there, but the point is that you need to be into it. After all, while DMing is time consuming, it's not a job. If you treat it like one, you are more likely to burn out quickly. Knowing this, you may want to think about joining a group that does round-robin DMing so you can bail out before it starts to burn.

But say you're an old warhorse like me; you caught the DM bug early and just can't shake it. Maybe you're the young me 30 years later and starting with the most current edition. You like running long campaigns. Your players appreciate the hand crafting you put into every session, and you enjoy watching your plans unfold and moving to final manifestation by the characters' decisions. It could be that you're just an old dog with fond memories of the World of Greyhawk and Forgotten Realms games of your youth. Or maybe you are chomping at the bit for the new Dark Sun books so you can get out of the typical fantasy mold. It's most likely, though, that you have your own game world swirling around in your head, and you want to shake up those D&D assumptions a bit. Lots of people run homebrew campaigns. The ability to do so is one of D&D's chief draws. No matter your situation, one of these days you are probably going to want to mess with expanses of the D&D game. When that day comes, there are tools in the *D&D Insider* Character Builder that if you don't know about now, you'll want to.

I know, I know, you already have a *D&D Insider* account or you wouldn't be reading this. I don't need to sell you anything. I'm not trying to. But you'd be amazed at the number of people I've talked to—I mean genuine 4E nerds—who didn't know about these tools in the Character Builder.

Limiting Your Campaign

Open the D&D Character Builder. Go to the "Manage" tab on the far top menu and then select the "Campaign Settings" tab on the menu just below the far top menu. Other than strong story examples and a healthy imagination, this may be your best tool in the creation and maintenance of limited campaigns. What do I mean by limited campaigns? You want a world without elves? You want to keep out that beta *Dragon Magazine* content until it becomes official? Both are reasons for having limited campaigns. They are campaigns where only a selection of the thousands and thousands of D&D rules bits are available to the players.

TM & © 2010 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

My favorite type of limited campaign is one where the limits are made for story reasons. If you're a story-telling DM with a strong sense of the tale you want to tell, you'll often want to limit the availability of more fringe concepts during character creation. Say you want a campaign that pits dragonborn settlers against human barbarians. It would be hard to do if there weren't a single human or dragonborn within the group. You might want to limit the group to almost all humans or dragonborn. You may even want to limit the humans to martial and primal classes only. The campaign settings key allows you to select the exact rules that are legal in your campaign. You can then give it a name and save the campaign and its elements into a .dndcamp file, email it to your players, and they can make their characters using the rules your campaign uses.

Story considerations aren't the only reasons to make a limited campaign. While the game as a whole is constantly reviewed and updated to make sure all of its moving parts work properly, there is nothing wrong with wanting to limit the moving parts after reflection on your comfort level with the rules and changes. A player typically only needs to worry about his powers; as DM, you have to deal with everyone's powers and a half a zillion other things while running and preparing the game. For that reason alone, you might want to limit your campaign to the *Player's Handbooks* and *Adventurer's Vaults*. It limits the number of books you need to deal with (and carry to the game). Always remember that DMing should be fun, not a chore. It's OK for you, as DM, to pick your level of new rules influx.

Expanding Your Campaign

You may not have noticed it, but we have only been discussing the virtues of one tab of the main window. There is another interesting tab hiding right behind it—the Custom Rules tab. It's the Restriction tab's evil twin, allowing you to expand your campaign's options.

Let's say you're the opposite of the campaign crafter. Let's say you're a collector of character creation rules and a bit of an amateur designer with hopes of getting something published in *Dragon* Magazine. This section lets you add things for world building reasons (races, languages, and deities), but it also lets you add the hard stuff—things like classes (through class features, builds, and powers), paragon paths, feats, and rituals.

Your custom rules will not talk to all the coding and formulas of the Character Builder like the ones that are updated regularly by the gaggle of howling programmers in the WotC building, but hey, your players will work with you. Many advanced players love the challenge of playtesting new things. They will put up with some basic math in order to do it.

Why Mess Around with This Stuff

You know what, if you are just running Dungeons & Dragons Encounters, only play Living Forgotten Realms, or run a very pop-and-pretzels game of beating up bad guys and spending their dough, then there is almost no reason to use these tools. But if you have some friends blowing into town and you want to run a high-quality game for them, then this is a great tool to spice things up a bit. Just make sure to set up some character creation time for the players that don't have *D&D Insider* accounts! (Hey, I'm a realist!) Then, when you can only squeeze out a biweekly or monthly game and your midnight hours become obsessed with creating that perfect, story-driven campaign, these tools well help you pull it off.

Tap ... Tap ... Anyone Out There?

I'm bummed. No one took me up on last month's Challenge of No. Luckily, there have been other letters and things to chat about. This month, let's hear how you were able to modify a campaign—be it limiting or expanding—to create a great play experience. I look forward to hearing your tales. If that doesn't get you sharing, maybe I'll just have to post some Raistlin and Drizzt fan fiction I found on an unsavory corner of the internet.

Help with Hazards

> ***One of the greatest aspects of a game world is the environment. There are more than just monsters lurking in the darkness. There are the mushrooms that release deadly spores, spider webs that immobilize characters, the pit of acid and spikes, and the Indiana Jones rolling boulder. I love these kinds of details, but coming up with them and making them usable for my table is kind of a chore. So I tried creating new hazards and traps, but there really is not a good guideline for me to follow (especially on the hazards).***
>
> ***—RatWarrior***

I agree. Players may forget the fourth raid by the drow they face in the moist, secondary passages of the Underdark, but they will not forget the battle that occurred in the fungus patch with vermillion grapplers and chokespore puffers during the bat migration. The book you're looking for is *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*. Its section on Advanced Encounters,

especially the parts on Terrain Powers and Designing Traps, are what you'll really want to focus on. Heck, it even has that giant rolling boulder trap.

Beyond that, scour other media for good trap, hazard, and environment ideas. Brainstorm how to inject them simply and viscerally into your game. If you need to make something into a trap, do that, but most of these types of things can be represented as terrain or terrain powers. Don't overlook the pure awesome that is re-skinning terrain. I've used the main mechanics for creeping ice (*Dungeon Master's Guide 2* page 58) for nearly half a dozen terrain effects just by changing the damage type. If my players have caught on, they've not said anything about it.

Four Freakn' Hours!?

I'm in a group where we switch DMing duties at the end of an adventure. We started running Revenge of the Giants *a little while ago (the group is now up to level 15), and we've noticed that single battles are taking 4 or more hours to get through.*

I thought the problem was that a couple of the players read through every ... single ... power ... every ... turn. So we added a timer. Each player gets between a minute and a minute and a half to take their actions (depending on how well they know the game and their party role). It helped, but not as much as I thought it would.

The next thing to go was monster health. Almost every monster had their health cut by 20%. Now things move more quickly, but the challenge is all but gone.

Are there other things we can do to try to strike a balance between encounter length and challenge?

—Shotgun_Caribou

I wish I were a gaming anthropologist, and I could study your group. I'm only half kidding. Ayep, it's official, it takes longer to run combats at paragon and epic tier than at heroic tier. There are many reasons, but one of the chief culprits is the damage roll. Because every power has a different variety of damage roll, the scrambling for, assembling, and counting of dice is a big time gobbler. You may want to think about using average damage.

Want to really speed up combats? Try this. On a miss, monsters take minimum damage (remember minions are not damaged on a miss). On a hit, they take average damage (rounded up). Critical hits stay the same. You don't need to use this for every battle, but for battles with many combatants, it should keep your combat moving with a speedy hum of attack rolls. At least, it will if people figure out those damage numbers beforehand and don't need to add everything up on the spot every time they attack something!

Tackling the Cheater

I'm DMing a group of relatively new players, so they don't quite understand what D&D is all about, though we've played several adventures before.

Essentially, there is one player who does not understand that the fun is in the journey, not the destination. He went nuts with the D&D Insider *Character Builder, making his character an almost godlike thing, even going so far as to edit feats and weapon damage. I continue to catch him, but I can't scold him or punish him because he is a friend, and I don't want to break a friendship over a game like this.*

So basically, I need to stop him from manipulating the game rules and show him that having one single, super powerful character is like a leech, sucking the fun from the rest of the party, who have voiced their concerns. I simply do not know how to do this, because everything I've done so far does not work.

—Ryophecles

Tell him he is being a jerk. Have him come over here and I'll tell him he is being a jerk. Heck, have him go to Gen Con, and I am sure we could get the entire RPGA event area to tell him he is being a jerk. I don't know you and I don't know this player, but you're more likely to ruin a friendship by putting up with bad behavior and letting someone roll over you like this than by telling your friend honestly that his selfish behavior is wrecking the game for everyone else.

You're the DM. It's your game, and it's your responsibility to make sure everyone is having a good time—including you. Talk to him reasonably. Tell him that if he wants to continue playing, he must follow the rules. Lay down the law when it comes to character building. Sure, he may decide that he doesn't want to play in your game, but he's not really playing in your game anyway. He's playing his own head game.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland caught the D&D bug at an impressionable age. Once the content manager for the RPGA and a developer for the 4th Edition D&D rules, he is now a freelance game designer doing work for Wizards of the Coast, Paizo Publishing, and is part of a fledgling group of game commentators and game designers called NeoGrognard. During the daylight hours he teaches game production classes at the International Academy of Design and Technology of Seattle.

Episode 29: Published Adventures

BY JAMES WYATT
illustration by Wayne England

I've had two sessions since I wrote my last column, thanks to the scheduling snafu that is Gen Con. This past Saturday night my father-in-law joined us for his first-ever experience with D&D. He was bewildered, mystified, and up way past his east-coast bedtime, but I think he had fun, and I know that the group appreciated his participation.

Let's see: Last time I wrote about planting some kind of mystery in the heart of the Fire Warren. I ended up putting a stone arrowhead in the kobold leader's pouch, carved with the jagged spiral symbol of Tharizdun. With it, I gave them a quest to discover "what the symbol is all about," which has proven to be an endless source of comedy, for reasons I can't quite understand. They've discovered that it's the symbol of the Elder Elemental Eye, but I haven't given them the quest XP for figuring out "what it's all about" yet. I'm not sure what I'm waiting for, but I know it has to be more dramatic than the druid NPC exclaiming and dropping the arrowhead when she saw the symbol.

Also in my last column, I tried to sort out the ramifications of naming the fire elemental (the primordial of fire who turned to the gods' side in the Dawn War) Imix. It occurred to me afterward that Tharizdun's corruption of the Princes of Elemental Evil might not have happened yet. It might be that, in my campaign, Tharizdun is not yet the Chained God—or perhaps he's working from within his extradimensional prison to corrupt these primordials to be his servants. He's working on Ogremoch, who's imprisoned somewhere in the Elemental Chaos, but really setting his sights high on Imix, one of the four most powerful primordials in existence. It'll be interesting to see how that plays out.

The shipwrecked characters have now found their way off the island they originally landed on and made their way to Haven—well, *near* Haven. It turns out that Haven has been taken over by a band of evil mercenaries . . . but I'm not going to get too much into that, because I'm drawing material and plotlines from an adventure that is not yet published. Don't want to spoil it for you.

So, yeah, I'm using someone else's adventure. What happened to my free-form, quest-driven, open-ended campaign? Actually, really interesting things, I think.

Make It Matter

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* has a discussion of incorporating published adventures into a campaign (pages 96–97), including advice on hooking characters into the adventure, adapting the adventure to your campaign's setting, and transitioning the characters out. If I were writing those pages today, I would add a section at the beginning based on what I've done in running this campaign.

If you run a published adventure as a one-shot, making characters just for that experience and starting something new when the adventure is over, then all you have is what the adventure gives you. That's a very straightforward approach: use one or more of the hooks provided in the adventure, explain to the players what their characters are doing and why, and get right to the action. If you're running an episodic campaign, you can use much the same approach.

When you're running a campaign with more overarching themes, character goals, and motivations—in short, story—then the trick to using a published adventure is tying the adventure's smaller story into your campaign's bigger ones. The advice in the DMG gets at some of that, but there's a larger issue that's becoming clearer to me now.

What I've tried to do in incorporating this adventure into my campaign, fundamentally, is to make the situation described in the adventure matter to the players and their characters. I didn't just have some bigwig ask them to go deal with the problem in Haven. I didn't have them stumble into Haven and run into the problem more or less by accident. I could have done that—my players have certainly demonstrated a willingness to be led by the nose in that way, unlike many groups of players, so I have every confidence that it would have worked.

Instead, I spent most of the first couple of sessions in the campaign laying groundwork—not planting seeds for this adventure specifically but building stuff that the characters and their players care about. I've given the characters, both individually and collectively, a lot of quests. (I was very gratified, by the way, to see the players really start using the quest cards I'd been giving them to keep track of what's on their agenda.) Most of them have individual quests related to their original reasons for traveling to Haven, and a couple of the players were bearing those individual quests in mind as they went through the encounters of the (soon-to-be) published adventure.

It was only after I laid that groundwork that I started considering the question of what happens when the characters get to Haven and realized that this adventure is actually a pretty good match.

What I was doing was not adapting the characters to fit the adventure (by giving them artificial motivations to pursue the goals of the adventure) but adapting the adventure to fit the characters by aligning the characters' existing goals with obstacles in the adventure. The result is an adventure that feels more like a part of the campaign and that has the players more invested and interested in the outcome.

I've used two basic techniques to pull this off.

Quest Weaving

Give characters their own personal reasons to visit locations, fight monsters, or seek treasures presented in the adventure. Aside from the main goals and storylines of the adventure, weave together characters' personal objectives with smaller objectives within the adventure.

For example, Valanri (my wife's genasi sorcerer) has a quest to retrieve the Tome of Striking Lightning from an ancient tower in the heart of the Bloodwhisper Forest and bring it back to her master, Laurish Samprey, in Angleburg. I'd long ago decided that the Bloodwhisper Forest was the stomping ground of a group of elves.

Well, it just so happens that this adventure I'm running has a section where the players, in order to make nice with a group of elves, need to venture into an ancient sanctuary and defeat the villain that's taken up residence there. As written, the sanctuary is underground, but some playing around with Dungeon Tiles has reconfigured it as a tower, and I've made a note that the Tome of Striking Lightning is in that tower. So soon enough, the entire group will have a reason to visit that tower, while Valanri has an extra task to complete while she's there.

Similarly, Aerin's quest to rebuild the Haven Guard is essentially tied to the overall plot of this adventure, and Antalaus's quest to rid himself of his curse might also get tied in.

Get in the Way

Once your characters have clear objectives in the form of both individual and group quests that they want to accomplish, put the events of the adventure between them and their goals. More specifically, put the *villain* of the adventure between them and their goals. Ultimately, completing the published adventure becomes a necessary prerequisite for achieving their own goals.

For example, Jesse the ranger was traveling to Haven to meet with Sir Brendan, a Knight of the Green Flame. This was part of her background as an aspirant knight—Brendan agreed to meet with her and consider her application for a promotion in the order. However, once she gets to Haven, she'll discover that Sir Brendan is a prisoner of the mercenaries. She can't achieve her goal until the party liberates the town from the mercenaries and frees the baron and Sir Brendan from their custody.

Basically, I set up the player characters with their own goals, many of which involve getting to the town of Haven. Then I took Haven itself and made it a place where adventure was happening. They can't just walk into Haven and talk to the people they want to talk to, because those people have fled from or been imprisoned by the evil mercenaries who've taken over the town.

Following My Own Advice

Looking again at the discussion of using published adventures in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, I've made use of some of that advice as well.

Plan Forward: I haven't done that for this adventure, because I decided to use this adventure pretty late in the planning. However, the process of building backgrounds for the characters involved some planning forward for future adventures that I want to use. I put names like Laurish Samprey of Angleburg and the town of Saltmarsh into those backgrounds because they appear in old D&D adventures I want to adapt for my campaign down the road.

Use Adventure Hooks: I ignored this advice, too. I did, however, use the first encounter of this published adventure, which is designed as a hook to draw the characters in, more or less as written and tied it to the end of the characters' previous adventure. When the characters emerged from the Fire Warren, they saw a plume of smoke signaling trouble on the opposite side of the island.

Tie in NPCs and Groups: The key thing I've done to tie this adventure into the themes of my campaign has to do with the identity of this band of mercenaries. In the adventure as written, they're devil-worshipers. I could use that just fine by tying them to a larger theme of forces trying to reestablish the rule of law in the remains of the fallen empire. I think it's a little stronger, however, if I tie them to one of the other villains I want to use in the campaign, such as the lich-queen Killesti. That might mean replacing some of the devils in the adventure with undead.

Plant Location Hooks or Maps: I did this on a very large scale by superimposing the location of the adventure onto my very sketchy map of Haven and its environs. In other words, rather than contriving a way to get the players to the site of the adventure, I put the adventure in the place they were going anyway.

Change Names: There's no flavor difference between the names in my campaign and the names in the adventures I'm using (unlike in past versions of Aquela), so I can keep Angleburg and Saltmarsh unchanged. I changed the site of this adventure to Haven, but only because I'd already put the name Haven (stolen from Bill Slavicsek's campaign) into character backgrounds.

Alter the Setting: The setting of this adventure is a group of villages tucked in a broad expanse of forest. Not anymore! Now the locations described in the adventure are scattered over a handful of islands in the Ducan archipelago. Instead of traveling overland to reach the shrine of Dagon (another location I modified to tie into character goals), they traveled by boat. It's just a flavor difference, but it's an important one for maintaining the feel of my campaign.

Adjust Monsters: As just mentioned, some of the devils that appear in the adventure might be changed to undead or magical constructs to fit with the idea that these mercenaries are servants of the lich-queen.

I also turned bullywugs in this adventure into fish-like humanoids that some of my players recognized from a certain massively multiplayer online role-playing game that shall remain nameless. I did that primarily because bullywugs appear elsewhere in my campaign outline, and I didn't want to overuse them. I ended up using the stat blocks mostly unchanged, except that I ignored some of the weird chaos abilities.

Scale Levels: That hasn't been necessary, and I've placed published adventures into the larger sketch of my campaign arc at the appropriate levels.

Bring Them Out: I haven't yet planned the next stage of the campaign in any detail. I do have a quest in mind for Sir Brendan to give Jesse once he's free, and that might serve as the impetus for the group's next adventure. I have some unresolved questions lingering from past adventures as well, and by tying the Iron Circle to the lich-queen, I'm creating the opportunity for the characters to investigate that connection further.

So that's it for this month. Next time, I think I'll talk about how writing my latest novel is changing the way I DM.

About the Author

James Wyatt is the Creative Manager for D&D R&D at Wizards of the Coast. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He also contributed to the *Eberron Campaign Setting* and is the author of several Dungeons & Dragons® novels set in the world of Eberron.